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ADVENTURE

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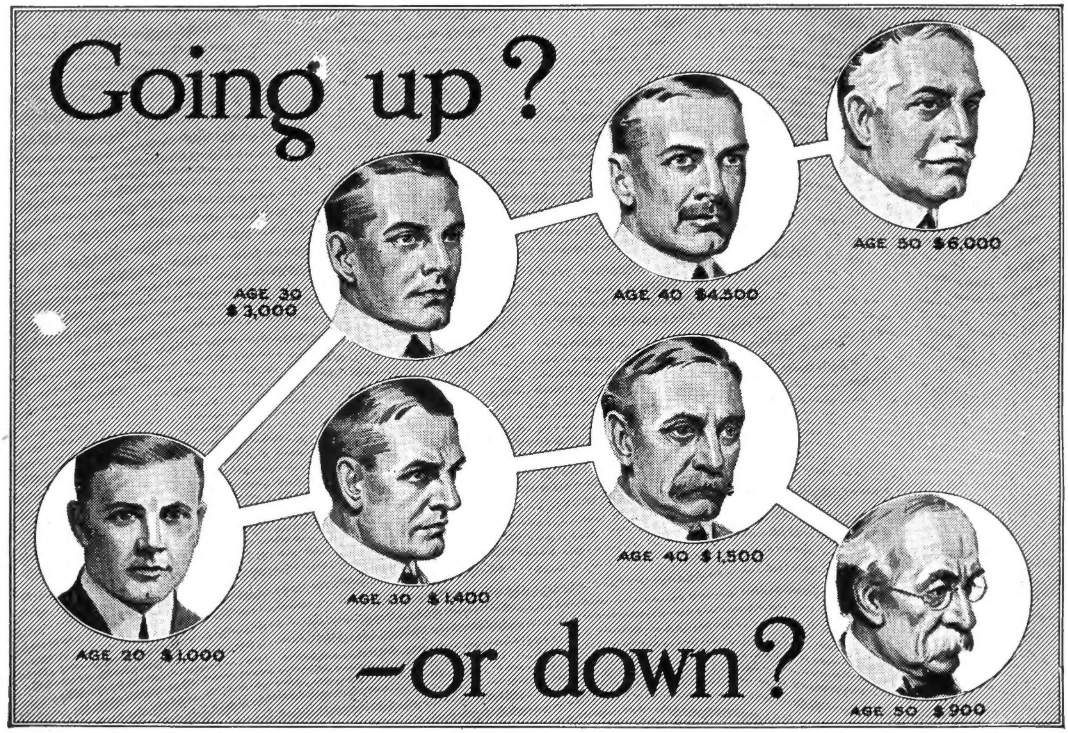

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August 20, 1922
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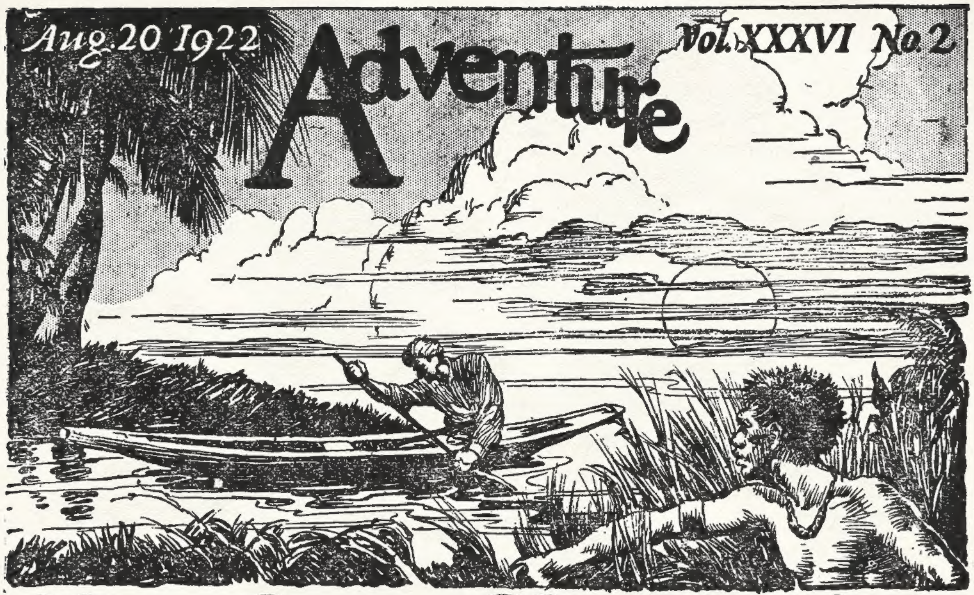
TWO hundred thousand Tatars fighting afoot, back across the Russian steppes, to their homeland. An English map-maker guiding them, although held as their prisoner. A treacherous lama plotting to betray them into an ambush of their enemies. "THE ROAD OF THE GIANTS," a complete novel by Harold Lamb in the next issue.

THE lot of a clerk in an Alleghany lumber camp is not exactly a bed of roses—what with the "gandy dancers" and all. But "the white-collar stiff" proves he has backbone. "THE COMMISSARY OF THE HILLS," a complete novelette by Max Bonter in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month



The Gray Charteris

A Four Part Story—Part I by Robert Simpson

Author of "The Other Allingham," "Gilford the Gifted," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE ONE-WOMAN CANOE

BEYOND question, it was the Night that gave him birth. A black night; blacker than the back of Ogulo's hand.

The hurtling wind that precedes the Niger Delta tornado had made all things bend or break before it. Flashes of forked lightning had split the dark as a gleaming knife-edge might make a jagged tear in a canopy of black velvet, and the rumbling, crackling rattle of the thunder had driven Ogulo, the dwarf, cowering into a corner of Grandison's deserted trading-factory in a whispering fear.

Then had come the rain, beating upon the corrugated iron roof of his shelter as if a thousand hands were wielding a thousand hammers. And Ogulo, who was accursed, had known to the marrow of him that it was not good at such a time to be no better than a bush dog that is without a name.

But toward the dawn there came a quiet, heavy and dank and breathless, in which all the mangrove-gripped Delta seemed to wait in a gasping silence for the coming of the light.

Then Ogulo-of-the-long-arms saw him for the first time.

As if it were emerging from the mouth of a bat-haunted cave, a one-woman canoe came out of the darkness of that African night into the angry, molten glare of the rising tropical sun. Curiously enough, there were no other canoes upon the bush-bound river when Ogulo looked up and down the broad, swift-running water. Later there were many, as always. Just then, however, the one-woman canoe was as solitary as its occupant.

It was little more than a stone's throw from Ogulo's hiding-place when he saw it, and it was not difficult for him to make out that the man in it was white even to his hair. He wore no hat, and the early morning sun, leaping from behind the encircling mangroves, glared upon the silver gray shock of it, so that it was a shining mark upon the

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rumpled length and breadth of the Benin River from the Kora-town curve to Marsden's beach.

Ogulo did not like it. White men did not travel in one-woman canoes. They might employ canoes of from eight to forty paddles when they could not procure any other form of locomotion, but never one-woman shells, which, by virtue of their size, compelled them to do their own paddling. Most of them could not, and the others did not want to. It was not that kind of country.

Presently, from his vantage point of concealment on the veranda of the erstwhile living quarters of the tumbledown ex-trading beach, it was apparent to Ogulo that the white old man's destination was his place of refuge.

And the moment the newcomer stepped from his flimsy canoe and put his foot upon the weed-grown clearing, the squat, apelike figure of the dwarf vanished from the veranda with a curious swaying gait that instantly brought one's attention to the great length of his arms.

In his native village of Akwanna, he had been proud as a killer of men, and it was said of him that he had broken the ribs of two men at once. But that had been before the curse had descended upon him, and though he was still Ogulo-of-the-long-arms, he faced his fellow-man, both white and black, warily or not at all.

It was obvious that the white man knew nothing of the black dwarf's presence in the upper rooms of the deserted trading factory. He was not a government official, and there was nothing about him to prove that he was a trader. Consequently, as almost every white man in the Niger Delta is one or the other of these, he was as mysterious as his loneliness and his revolutionary mode of travel could make him.

Whether he had any personal interest in the tale of Grandison's beach was doubtful. A single glance at it in passing was sufficient to inform even a tyro in Delta affairs that its story was not a new one there or anywhere.

With a background of stolid green bush less than fifty yards to the rear of it the place was a picture of dejection, free from any evidence of human life; the likely habitation of luxury-loving puff adders and cobras, which have a weakness for anything with a roof over it.

When he had tied up his canoe to one of the soundest of the rotting breakwater sticks with a painter made of the fiber of the wine palm, and placed a rather dusky panama upon his head for protection against the rapidly increasing heat of the sun, the intruder strode toward the first of the outbuildings that happened to lie in his path.

Since the door sagged drunkenly upon a single hinge, he went in. It had been Grandison's kernel store, but there was scarcely any trace of the fact left now. Save for the kernel-brown lizards that continued to keep the place comparatively free of flies, it was empty.

Directly opposite was the shop, which, though the padlock had been removed by sheer force, still retained its high, wire-netted counter and most of its other heavier fittings. There was a hint of the unusual in this circumstance, but a cursory examination was all the stranger accorded it before he proceeded to climb the stairs leading to the living quarters overhead.

With a glance along the veranda upon either side, the white man turned to the right, where he came first upon a room that had been Grandison's office, and beyond that a bedroom. The office floor was strewn with papers—oil and kernel vouchers of various colors, blue and pink predominating, expense sheets, letter-heads and cable blanks—and in the midst of the mixture of stationery stood a broken down Madeira chair, one of the broad wicker arms sagging almost to the floor.

Some of the kernel vouchers and the like had been blown or carried into the bedroom, from which everything had been removed except a torn and dirty mattress, which occupied one corner. This suggested to the stranger that the place boasted an occupant—a caretaker of some sort probably.

He stood looking at the mattress for a little while and was on the point of turning to leave the room when he felt the tips of broad, black fingers upon his chest.

Nothing before that, not a sound; and yet though the fingers came from behind without warning, the long arms of Ogulo the dwarf went but little farther.

Swift as thought itself, the stranger bent well forward and a fraction of a second later Ogulo, with a hoarse cry of alarm, hurtled through space over his intended victim's head as a stone flies from a catapult.

The opposite wall stopped him and the shock of the collision was felt throughout the whole building as the dwarf dropped to the floor upon his hands and knees and stayed there.

The trick was an old one; just a sudden bending forward of the body, a sharp upward heave of the back and shoulders correctly timed, and the attacker's own impetus did the rest. So that there was nothing supernatural about it.

It was the perfect coordination that amazed. Thought and action were one, and the paralyzing speed with which they had moved in conjunction with each other, suggested that the mysterious invader of Ogulo's refuge was accustomed to the business of protecting himself under any and every circumstance.

His panama had fallen off, dislodged by the dwarf's flying body, and as Ogulo did not appear to have any companions, and did not himself seem in the least anxious to get up again, the white man carelessly contemplated the black for a few moments, as if deciding what should be done with him.

"Flat on your belly, black snake!" he commanded suddenly. "Flat like lizard! Now—crawl!"

Ogulo understood perfectly and obeyed without a moment's hesitation. His teeth chattered and his eyes gleamed then glazed with fear. Then he stopped crawling; his semi-paralyzed muscles refusing to function. His head sunk forward till his forehead touched the floor, and his long arms stretched out from his stunted body so that he formed a misshapen cross. The tale of his ash-gray terror was whispered into the dust.

It was an expressive as well as an impressive submission. From the standpoint of Ogulo, whose shadow of a soul was momently shrinking, it was the only thing to do.

Because, though the stranger's mane-like mass of silver gray hair was the hair of an old, old man, his face was almost that of a boy.

CHAPTER II

HOGMANAY SANDY MACGREGOR

THE white assistants on Marsden & Co.'s Benin River trading factory drank copiously of lime juice—for want of anything better during business hours—so that they might be enabled to curse the name of Morrison out of a moist throat.

Even Garland, the shop clerk, who was completing his second trip of two years, and was therefore steeped in Oil River's tradition, regarded Hugh Morrison as the personification of cold, blind power, pitilessly indifferent to what became of the flesh and blood he fed to the machine of his ambition.

Hugh Morrison was Marsden & Co. From the standpoint of the few independent traders who still remained in the field, he was also the octopus that was slowly squeezing the life out of their feebly squirming bodies.

"For all that, Morrison isn't so very much worse than most of the rest of 'em would be if they had the chance," Garland admitted in the privacy of his own room after eleven o'clock breakfast, when he and his juniors were discussing the imminent possibility of one of Morrison's infrequent tours of inspection on board the Marsden yacht *Bonny*.

Inasmuch as Morrison was accompanied on this occasion by his two daughters, his visit was softened by the glamour of the unusual; the more so because the fact that Morrison was the father of daughters only, was not nearly so surprizing as the circumstance that he had ever found time to be disturbed by the inclination to get married at all.

"Most of the fellows who are so busy whining about Morrison's business methods," Garland went on, "would give their eye teeth to have brains enough to fill his shoes, and, from our angle, few of them care a *bicuba* any more than Morrison does about your luck or mine. When they pay you off at Liverpool, you're chucked out, that's all."

"What do you mean?" the most callow of his juniors asked nervously.

"You'll find that out when you get there," Garland declared with that irritating mysteriousness of which the typical Coaster is so fond. "And it's all for the privilege of working ten hours a day in some such fever-soaked, mosquito-ridden hell-hole as this!"

Garland laughed without malice.

"The world, my children, is full of fatheads and I have the honor to be one of them."

However, Garland's grin stayed. He knew what the Oil Rivers trading game was worth and had played it according to the rules.

"The only way to tackle this kind of

gamble," he added, extracting a cigaret from a tin on his table, "is the government's way. That's something like an even money shot. But when, as in this business, you stake your heart and your stomach and your teeth and your liver on a bet that, on your third trip, is ten to one against, that's just plain —— tommy-rot."

"But how about Hogmanay or Morrison himself?" one of the beach clerks asked doubtfully. "Living here doesn't seem to have done them any harm."

"Two out of two hundred, my son," Garland returned, as if he were familiar with the question. "Proves nothing. There are some men even these swamps can't kill, but they are freaks, and I wouldn't put up my money on being one of them, if I were you."

He smiled, adding:

"Who but a freak of sorts would go on wearing a beard and playing funeral marches, for the love of them, in a God-forgotten place like this? Anybody seen my 'Pink Un'?"

Nevertheless, the "freak of sorts" to whom Garland so facetiously referred, was liked by his assistants as few trading agents in the Delta were liked by the rank and file.

Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor was Hugh Morrison's first lieutenant among agents actually in the field. The Hogmanay in his name was gratuitous and was accounted for by the simple circumstance that he was born on "Hogmanay"—the Scotch equivalent for New Year's Eve.

He was a Goliath of a man, who looked like a blacksmith trying to feel at home in white drill, and he insisted upon wearing, in spite of the discomfort of such a thing in the tropics, a light brown beard of commanding length and breadth. Cautious, shrewd and accustomed to handling words with the greatest of care, he drank a man's drink without giving offense, and expressed himself principally through the medium of an idealized penny whistle.

Strewn about his office and bedroom and veranda were numerous other musical instruments, varying in size from the jew's harp to a cumbersome 'cello, which he always anathematized when it came time to go home again, but the penny or tin whistle was his favorite. In his bare-footed, cow-herding days in the vicinity of Perth, a penny whistle, that had cost no more than that, had been the first musical instrument he had ever owned.

Nevertheless, no one had ever accused MacGregor of being a sentimentalist. Neither was he a musician who had fallen into the wrong groove. Rather was he a more than usually successful trader, who had the uncanny ability to coax the maximum of results out of the sun-and-swamp-born lassitude of the Delta native, much as he coaxed the true pitch out of the climate-flattened strings of his violin or 'cello.

His presence in the Benin River district was generally known to be due to the strategic purposes of Morrison; partly because the Benin River factory controlled the Marsden & Co. mahogany concessions beyond Siluko, and greatly because its geographical situation placed it in the center of the last stronghold of independent trading on the Lower Niger.

Two trading factories at Siluko, two at Koratown and Captain Bart Jardine's trading hulk, which Hogmanay could see quite distinctly from his veranda, were all that were left of the independents—and it was Hogmanay's business in life to remove them, either by buying them in or by forcing them out. And he attended strictly to his business, even though the trouble his situation gave him did compel him to extract some very thoughtful tunes from his whistle.

On these occasions, he sat on the veranda overlooking the beach and the river and played with his eyes closed—doleful Highland laments, that made his Kroo-boy chief steward and the Jakri punkah-boy emit low whining sounds of savage ecstasy.

Once he had played "The Flowers of the Forest," dead march tempo, on the 'cello, and whether it was merely coincidental or not, the lamentable fact remained that a fight started in the galley, and the small Jakri cook's mate was deprived of part of an ear, which had evidently been too tempting for his adversary's teeth to resist.

However, the dingy-looking trading-hulk, which lay close into the bush directly opposite Hogmanay's oil wharf, gave him more food for thought than any other thing or circumstance.

Once upon a time it had been known as the *Akerri* and as such had sailed the seas for many gin-laden years, plying between Hamburg and the Oil Rivers. The late Captain Edward Jardine had been upon the bridge of the *Akerri* when the decrepit old gin-tank had made her last trip to the Coast. Wallowing and groaning and rattling her plates like a hardware truck bumping over the cobbles, she had come to rest, with a sound resembling a sigh of relief, fast upon a mudbank in the vicinity of her present position.

Whereupon, the shipping company had decided that it would be cheaper to sell her —minus her engines—for the price of old iron, than to attempt to get her off and sail her home again. Captain Jardine, who had always had an ambition to trade, had made the proposal and it had been accepted almost without demur.

So the *Akerri*, despoiled of the throbbing heart that had lain beneath her solitary smoke-stack, had become a mere shell of black, painted iron, shifting this way and that, as the tide and her moving bed of mud dictated. When the rains came, she hung low in the water, her funnel gaping to heaven like an extinct volcano; but in the dry season, she rose, foot by foot, as the river dropped lower and lower, until she revealed the stark, unlovely nakedness of her rusty, brown hull below the water line.

Captain Ed. Jardine had proved himself a first-class trader. He had been a thorn in Morrison's flesh for several years. And then he had died of blackwater fever one evening, and it was believed that a dangerous competitor had been providentially removed.

But Captain Edward Jardine had a brother, who was also the skipper of a gin-tank. His name was Bart. No one had suspected that he would attempt to fill his dead brother's shoes; and no one admitted that he had.

Bart Jardine was, without doubt, the worst trader in the Delta. His business sense was absolutely nil and his prejudice against the sale of trade gin—due principally to a curious detestation for the smell of the sawdust in which the bottles were packed—was known and grinned at from Siluko to Old Calabar.

Nevertheless, Bart Jardine stuck to it, and tried to be dignified in the process, which, for him, was most difficult, because he was naturally a nondescript, full of strange and awful possibilities, it is true, but utterly without personality.

His complexion was that of a wet handkerchief, his mouth drooling and weak, his long gaunt face the mask of tragedy, and, his thin, mouse-colored hair completing his general aspect of neutrality, no one paid much attention to his lean, attenuated body. His eyes were the most prominent things about him. When he was not in temper, they were as lifeless as those of the dead.

He would sit under the awning on the after deck for hours, drinking lime juice and brandy alternately, and survey the bush and the river and the sun-flayed life thereof with a dull, fishy stare that might have presaged a cataclysm.

It meant, however, little more than a renewed gathering together of reasons why he should not trade as other men did. These reasons he hurled, like bullets from a machine-gun, at Margaret.

Margaret was his daughter, and her presence on the hulk was almost as remarkable as the absence of trade gin. Yet the reason was simple enough.

Since she had been unable to persuade her father, by letter, to sell his new property, Margaret had come out to argue with him in person, and, failing in that, had remained because she believed it was the only thing to do.

Though she had never had anything in common with the lank caricature of a man she knew as Dad, she felt that it was impossible to leave him in a place like that, alone.

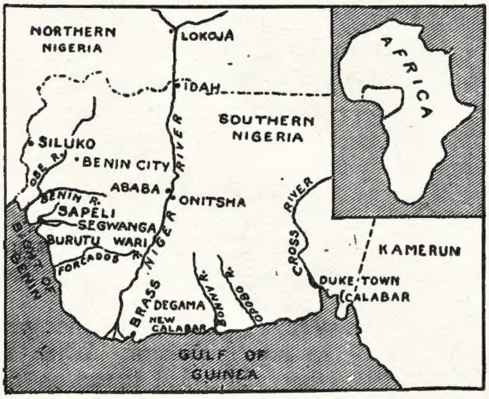
And it was Margaret's situation that gave Hogmanay so much concern. When he could detect her white-clad figure on the hulk's bridge, he frowned upon himself and felt, as he looked about him, that he was more comfortable than he had any right to be.

And unquestionably, with its squat, red-roofed warehouses, its little wharves, its two-storied house of light green, its wine and coconut palms and gigantic mango trees, its carefully trimmed lime hedges and white-washed gutters, its well-kept lawn and the ever-present cluster of trade canoes that huddled alongside its concrete breakwater from dawn to dark, Marsden's beach gave the impression of being an oasis of promise and of clean, open-and-above-board action in the midst of a desert of brooding mystery and gloom.

DOWN-river, the mud-brown Benin swirled madly between solid walls of mangrove-green into a gray haze, out of which there came a sound like the distant beating of many drums. No ship ever entered there. Because of the lurking, shifting sandbar the Benin River gripped between its teeth, things that were of the world outside came in by way of Forcados, one of the few really navigable mouths of the Niger—that great black mother of so many waters.

Arrived at Forcados, somber-appearing cargo boats and an occasional low-draft ex-passenger steamer removed from the mail service, steamed slowly past Burutu, and thereafter scraped their way cautiously through a maze of narrow, bush-lined creeks until they finally emerged upon the Benin something less than a mile below the spot where the hulk was anchored.

This did not happen often. But, in any case, Hogmanay did not enthuse over these visitations as much as he did over the arrival of Thursday afternoons.



On Thursday afternoons Margaret came and sat on his veranda in spite of her father's objections, and ate his cookies and drank his tea and listened to his music and told him what her father happened to have thought of him that morning, which was neither sacred nor complimentary.

And always Hogmanay tried to say what was on his mind. The nearest he had come to it so far was Elgar's "*Salut d'Amour*" on the 'cello.

This Thursday afternoon Hogmanay met Margaret at the head of the stairs leading up from the beach. She was accompanied, as usual, by Noni, her maid, who possessed herself of her mistress' sun-helmet and straightway squatted—if anything so dainty as Noni could possibly squat—on the top step of the stairs, while Hogmanay led his guest toward a secluded corner of the veranda.

"Glad you were able to come," he said, as though he had had some doubt about it. "The Morrisons may get here any day now, and I wanted to have another chat wi' ye before they could interrupt us. Tea'll be ready in a jiffy and—oh, I see ye've brought the music."

Margaret smiled as Hogmanay removed a violin from a wicker rocker. And she did not smile often; never simply for the sake of being pleasant. In fact, her personality, to the uninitiated, was rather forbidding, and, for the benefit of the passer-by, femininity was written only in the sound of her voice and in the curl that was in her hair.

She even attempted to hide the fact that her hair curled by wearing it pulled straight back from her forehead, but, fortunately, the effort was not altogether successful. Hogmanay knew, also, that for a woman who, at times, seemed to go out of her way to be hard and unsympathetic, she had the softest and kindliest hand he had ever known.

Her eyes were big and deep and somber, reminding Hogmanay of a house with all the shades drawn, and, though only in her twenty-fifth year, hers was the face of a woman who appeared to have had little recollection of ever having been a girl.

The principal reason for this was the scar.

It had plundered her life of many things and though it did not materially disfigure, her mirror told her that she was not as other women.

A thin, dead white line, following the curve of her cheek to her chin, the scar looked as if it might have been caused by falling on a newly sharpened scythe. There was, however, no explanation for it, and Margaret, holding aloof behind the barrier it had subconsciously created, compelled the world to climb that barrier—if it wanted to.

Another influence that had had much to do with Margaret's apparently unbending attitude toward life in general, was her antecedents. Born of a marriage that had been as free from romance as a flannel petticoat, her forebears, aside from her father, consisted principally of several tintypes that revealed a big-bosomed woman dressed after the fashion of the late eighties, and of a spinster aunt, who had been notable for a fearful and exacting love of God and a horror of a split infinitive.

Therefore, Margaret's life from childhood to adolescence had been a serious thing, utterly without levity. She had, however, to thank her aunt for a decent respect for the King's English and for an education that her father had not seemed to consider polite or necessary.

"No possibility of the Morrisons' arriving today?" she asked. "I'm afraid Morrison wouldn't like it if he caught you feeding the enemy."

"What? Hugh?"

Hogmanay took charge of Margaret's music, shouted in a stentorian voice for the punkah-boy and then established himself in a canvas deck-chair.

"I'm thinking ye're all wrong about Hugh Morrison. Ye've never even seen the man."

"No. But I'm going to."

"Aye, I don't doubt that—not a bit. And I'll warrant ye'll be surprized, too. He's a surprizin' man. Simple. Nothing intricate about him. Like Burns's poetry or a soda scone."

The chief steward, bulkily resplendent in a new piece of Madras, brought in the tea tray and laid it upon a wicker table after Hogmanay had made room for it by removing a battered-looking cornet.

"There is nothing very intricate about a violin string, either," Margaret suggested dryly; "but a Thug and a Paganini get quite different results out of it."

"I see." Hogmanay glanced toward the river to where the hulk wallowed in the late afternoon sunshine. "How's your father?"

Margaret sipped her tea, then nibbled at a biscuit. Secretly, she liked MacGregor's ponderously adroit way of slipping around conversational corners, without any apology, whenever it suited his purpose best.

"None the better for your latest advance in prices," she said with her customary frankness. "And he isn't going to sell out. Said so this morning. He called you a gang of cutthroats or worse. I don't suppose you want to make him a better offer?"

"Um—no. Hardly that. His stock's not improving with age, as ye might say. It's a pity, too, because I'd like—well, as I've remarked before, living in that old tub isn't doing you any good."

MacGregor's voice softened, and Margaret looked down river hurriedly to avoid the kindly solicitude in his expression.

"Thank you. But I did not come in search of sympathy."

"No. That's right. But I don't like to sit here watching you wearing yourself out on a forlorn hope like that. It's making you hard, too, both inside and out, and that's awful bad for a woman as young as you."

Margaret's eyes dulled a moment, then brightened desperately as she turned toward Hogmanay again.

"I'm really anxious to know what the Morrison girls are like. I think it's going to be a shock to see a white woman again after all these months."

Hogmanay nodded. He thought Margaret looked just a little paler than usual and he knew that her enthusiasm over the impending arrival of the "Morrison girls" was plainly forced. She did not expect to meet them, even in the desolation of Benin River, except at a carefully measured distance.

"Ye'll find Catherine to be as fine a lassie as ye ever knew," he said, and spoke with conviction as a result of having acquired first-hand opinions of his own upon the several members of Hugh Morrison's household. "And Elsie is just a girl who thinks she wishes she were a man. She's responsible for the trip; and Catherine, I've no doubt, is responsible for her. That's ay been the way of it as long as I've known them. There's a Miss Goddard on board, too, so they tell me, but——"

Hogmanay stopped and his glance went in such sharp amaze over Margaret's shoulder that she turned her head quickly to discover the cause.

At the corner of the veranda, with a rain-battered sun-helmet tucked under his arm, was a perfect stranger to them both.

A man whose hair was of silver, but whose face——

CHAPTER III

"THE GRAY MAN WHO NEVER HURRIED."

AT FIRST the thing was unbelievable, almost unpleasant; an incongruous combination of youth and age, each belying and defying the other.

There were no lines about his mouth and scarcely a trace of one upon his forehead. His skin was as pink and smooth as any boy's, and the blue of his eyes was tranquil and clear.

Lean and straight of body, the quiet, but none the less deliberate force of him clashed with the sullen, humid atmosphere of the Niger Delta, as steel clashes on steel, so that one could almost see the sparks.

His dress was simple. A khaki shirt, gray flannel trousers and heavy-soled brown boots, declared that he was clothed after the fashion of normal men, but the fact was not important. Margaret looked at him a second time, and then a third, and kept on looking, vaguely wondering if mythology was altogether a myth, for here was a man who might readily be gifted with the attributes of a god.

Noni had risen from the top step of the stairs and was dubiously venturing along the veranda in the direction of Garland's room, and her expression plainly showed what she thought of the startling visitor. A confused chattering came up from the beach below.

"I beg your pardon. Don't let me intrude. I will come back again later."

The stranger's voice was firm, and he seemed wholly unaffected by the commotion he had caused.

Hogmanay had risen to his feet, the hospitality and curiosity of the far places struggling with suspicion to gain the mastery of his expression. Wandering unknowns were not common in the Benin River country, and this stranger would have been unusual anywhere.

"It's no intrusion, man, if ye'll descend so low as to drink a cup o' tea. Miss Jardine'll not mind, I'm sure. My name's MacGregor," Hogmanay concluded pointedly.

"And mine is Charteris," the newcomer declared without any hesitation, moving toward them. "I have heard of both Miss Jardine and Mr. MacGregor and am glad to have this opportunity of meeting them together."

He shook hands with Hogmanay and bowed to Margaret with a studied politeness that made him seem a still more exaggerated figure in her eyes. If he noticed the scar, his glance did not linger there, nor come back to it in the questioning manner of so many men who met her for the first time.

"Tea, as it happens, is one of my principal reasons for calling," he said, as he accepted the low wicker rocker Hogmanay dragged forward for him. "I find I am out of it and have to get a new supply. Also some other things. There isn't any objection, I suppose, to my putting up at Grandison's place for a while?"

"Grandison's!"

Although the question had been addressed to MacGregor, the exclamation was Margaret's. Hogmanay's eyes widened, then narrowed cannily.

"No, I don't suppose there is," he declared slowly, and, as if the question were not at all out of the way, turned to the diminutive punkah-boy who squatted behind him and told him to find the steward.

Then, casually, to the man who had called himself "Charteris"—

"Been out here long?"

"Not very long."

"Who for?"

"You mean, have I been employed by any one?"

"That's it."

"No. Just nosing around."

"On spec'?"

"Not that exactly. It's an interesting country, and I like it."

MacGregor sat up straight.

"You like it!"

"Yes. Why not?"

Margaret laughed, while Hogmanay mopped his expansive forehead and the prickly-heat-covered back of his neck, and looked about him in search of the right thing to say. Then the siren of a Warri-bound government launch gave a sudden strident wail of greeting from the river as it passed, and both he and Margaret waved to the solitary sun-helmeted figure on its deck.

"That's Daniel Dane Parker—the Great Dane—just been appointed provincial commissioner," MacGregor informed Charteris. "Used to be D. C. at Segwanga. Ever meet him?"

"Once, I think," Charteris returned easily, but did not say where.

"A fine man. He'd be glad to hear you say you like this country. Hates it like Hades himself." A pause. "Seen much of it?"

"A little."

"Travel around in a launch, I suppose?"

"No. I prefer a canoe. No engine to bother with, and paddling keeps you fit. It's been splendid so far."

Margaret laughed again, but rather faintly this time, and Hogmanay's astonishment was so keen that he did not observe the return of the punkah-boy until the punkah began to swing again.

The Kroo-boy steward stood off a few paces awaiting orders, but MacGregor paid no attention to him. That a white man could possibly prefer a canoe to a launch and should do his own paddling, was utterly beyond the comprehension of so old a Coaster as Hogmanay.

In fact, for a second or two, while he surreptitiously pulled his sticky shirt and singlet away from his chest, and allowed a breath of punkah-cooled air to reach it, his eyes lingered on his visitor's finger-nails, as if he expected to find the reason for such revolutionary practise there. Then, remembering his duties as host, he gave the steward his orders, with the added injunction to "make quick" about executing them.

"Well, I'll admit ye've got queer notions o' enjoyment," he committed himself to Charteris at last. "Or maybe, I'm unfortunate in my way o' thinkin'. But if I am, there are a lot o' folk I can get to agree with me—even Miss Jardine, who makes it her business to disagree with me on everything else."

"Which isn't strictly true," Margaret defended. "However, I can't approve of Grandison's beach as a residence. It's full of snakes."

"Not now," Charteris broke in mildly. "At least, not quite. I cleared out a lot of them this morning."

"But there aren't any beds or chairs or——"

"Oh, I manage. That's part of the fun."

"Fun!" MacGregor snorted. "If ye didn't look so convincingly sane, I'd say ye were daft. You make me feel like a hothouse plant."

The reappearance of the steward afforded a pause that was grateful, and while the Kroo-boy served Charteris, Margaret also had an opportunity to observe the latter more closely.

She realized at once how difficult it would be for any one to estimate Charteris at anything like his true value, or to decide, the first time one met him, whether one liked him or was just intensely curious about his history.

Hogmanay's attitude was different, having less to do with the man himself and more with his purpose in being there at all. Men who were still in full possession of their senses did not wander aimlessly about the Niger swamp belt for the fun of it.

True, a white man here and there, in the years since Hogmanay began as a kernel clerk, had "gone native," and one of them who had done so prior to MacGregor's appearance on the Coast, had died just recently after sixteen years of life in a native village in the Brass country. But these men were not like Charteris. He was still a white man.

"Wouldn't ye like to be a normal human being for a wee while?" MacGregor asked. "I've got an extra room, a stock of good liquor, a billiard table of sorts, and a gramaphone for them that likes the skeleching things."

"Thank you. That is very good of you and I assure you I appreciate your generosity very much. But I'm afraid it would be too luxurious, particularly the billiard table. I'd get into bad habits."

"Umph!" MacGregor grunted in unqualified disapproval. "And yet you eat and drink and talk and look as if ye knew enough to know better. What is it? A bet ye're settling or a theory you're trying to prove, or just—oh, the usual thing?"

Charteris laughed softly, and Margaret was glad that he understood so readily the big trader's somewhat blunt and often startling inclination to take his fellow man's sense of humor for granted.

"What, might I ask, is the usual thing?" Charteris inquired as if he really wanted to know.

"Oh, mahogany, rubber, or a trading-factory location. If ye'd like to buy Grandison's place, I'll sell it to you at a bargain."

"Not for me," Charteris declared, with the unmistakable air of one who was a vagabond from choice. "But I'd like to stop there for a little while. The house still has a good roof, and I understand the village of Dowadda is directly behind it. I can get things to eat there if I'm too lazy to buy my own yams and chickens and do my own cooking."

"I don't doubt it—don't doubt it at all," Hogmanay commented dryly. "But I'm thinking that listenin' to you would be awful bad for the morals of my first-timer assistants. Ye say it all so natural-like, as if it were quite a nice, respectable way o' doing things."

Charteris had disposed of his quota of fritters and there was nothing abnormal about his apparent liking for tea biscuits and black currant jam. For a minute or so, Margaret had the impression that, after all, he was only a boy playing with life in the guise of a man; and then she caught a glimpse of the blue in his eyes and the boy was gone. Somehow, that particular glint of blue matched the age that was in his hair, and she had the curious conception of a soul encased in ice.

"I understand you have a perfectly healthy feud operating in this section of the country?" Charteris queried after a short pause, as though he wanted the conversation to drift away from himself. "I've heard interesting whisperings of it all the way down from Bwallatown."

"Ye mean the rumpus between Chief Agwala and Abado?"

"I imagine that's it. What is it all about?"

Hogmanay grunted disparagingly.

"It's a fight between a sluggish but crafty fat man and a quicker, craftier lean one. Chief Agwala is the biggest man in this part o' the world, both in size and importance. Abado, on the other hand, is only a Sobo and of no importance at all. But he's the cleverest and the largest trader on the black side o' the tradin' fence, and he's going to make Agwala wish he'd kept a still tongue in his head afore he dies. It began on my beach in Segwanga nearly ten years ago."

THEN, because Charteris seemed really interested, Hogmanay explained that Chief Agwala, whose power in the Benin River country was greater than the power of the white man's money, had blandly informed Abado one afternoon on the Marsden beach at Segwanga, that he, Abado, was the "son of the mother of pigs."

Abado had not liked the designation, but at that time he had only begun to express his genius as a trader. So he held his peace and waited. But that day passed silently into Abado's history as a day to be remembered when Agwala's tongue would be torn out by the roots.

His wealth in canoes and oil and kernels and rubber, in sons and daughters, wives and unofficial slaves, grew in determined preparation for that time; this, in spite of the fact that, though his wealth was now the wealth of kings, though his trading canoes surpassed in size and number those of any Jakri except Agwala, though his wives were many and were recruited, for the greater part, from the compounds of Jakri chiefdom, he could never overcome the undying circumstance that he was only a Sobo of low and insignificant birth.

"Then it's been a comparatively bloodless duel, so far?" Charteris asked, putting down his cup.

"I think so. Abado is a patient man. And, by the way, that little girl who was sitting on the stair head as ye came up is one of the most interested bystanders in the affair. She is a daughter of Abado and her mother is a sister of Agwala. I'm thinkin' she'll have her work cut out for her to know which way to jump when the time comes."

"I don't imagine that will bother her very much," Margaret said. "She doesn't like her father or his people, and she fights like a wildcat if any of the Kroo-boys even hint that she is a Sobo."

Around the corner of the veranda, Noni had renewed her seat on the top step of the stairs; and though she was but a speck of human froth whirling around in the vortex of her father's passion for revenge upon her mother's people, she apparently gave the circumstance no more consideration than an infant who has just been comforted with a sugar-coated pacifier.

From the top of her crinkly head, wound about with a gaudy silk handkerchief, to the soles of her naked little feet, that were so fearful of being demonstrative in the presence of white people, she was the personification of childlike simplicity.

"That sounds as if it might develop into something really interesting," Charteris admitted, looking casually down river. "Are you expecting visitors, MacGregor?"

Margaret's eyes followed the direction Charteris indicated, anticipating nothing more than a launch or possibly Agwala's forty-paddle canoe. But she caught her breath sharply as a broad strip of dazzling white, that grew broader and broader, thrust itself out of the green bank of bush about a mile below the hulk's anchorage.

"It's the *Bonny!*" she announced, and her excitement was genuine enough. "Isn't she a beauty?"

MacGregor, however, looked disappointed.

"Now, that's not very kind of Hugh to interrupt us like that. He might have waited another hour anyway."

Then to Charteris with a real note of regret he added:

"It's a pity ye can't use the extra room.

But maybe ye'll change your mind after a day or two at Grandison's?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprized if I did," Charteris admitted. "Meantime, I'll go down to the shop and order what I want and be off."

He shook hands cordially with Margaret and so convincingly voiced the hope that he might have the pleasure of meeting her again, that, for the moment, she believed he meant it.

But when he had gone into the shop and she and Hogmanay were walking slowly down to the gig wharf, followed respectfully by Noni, Margaret touched Hogmanay's arm with an odd and unusually impulsive desire to be sure that he, at least, was real.

"Isn't he queer?" she asked and was conscious of the fact that her voice did not sound natural.

Hogmanay looked down at her and deliberately ignored the question.

"If I get Hugh to raise his price, will ye promise me to go home whether your father accepts it or not. You're gettin' awful white, and I've got enough to worry me without havin' to watch the bridge o' that old tank to be sure you're still alive."

Margaret laughed nervously, and Hogmanay actually colored. He was having an even more desperate struggle with words than she imagined.

"I wish ye would," he persisted stubbornly as they lingered on the gig wharf for a minute or two. "Ye see—I—I'm thinkin' I'd like to have ye there waitin' for me when I got home mysel'."

Margaret studied her ringless left hand which rested on the wharf rail. She was trembling from head to foot, but Hogmanay, who waited in a heavy, guilty sort of silence, did not know that. Then she glanced up at him and smiled; a smile that obliterated the scar completely.

"Don't let's become sentimental," she said hurriedly. "You're just sorry for me and I'm the only woman in the place and—good-by." The smile became even brighter. "I'm sorry we didn't have any music."

She beckoned nervously to Noni and they stepped into the waiting gig-boat. The Kroo-boy oarsmen pushed off and, in a moment more, Hogmanay was alone watching Margaret giving all of her attention to the tiller ropes. He walked slowly back to the shop stroking his beard reflectively.

When he entered, he discovered Charteris paying for the goods he had bought with several perfectly good sovereigns, which he had extracted, like so many pennies, from his trouser pocket.

The fact was interesting principally because, in the Delta and Nigeria generally, white men did not carry any currency to speak of. They ordered by signed *chits* and settled in cash at the end of each month.

"If ye keep much of that yellow stuff about ye," MacGregor declared insidiously, as Garland went to the safe at the back of the shop to procure his customer's change, "it might be worth a man's while to pay ye a visit after dark."

"He'd be horribly disappointed," Charteris returned with a shadow-like smile, "if he called tonight. There's a bank at Burutu, isn't there?"

"There is," Hogmanay affirmed; and added out of the goodness of his heart, and because he wanted to know something of the stranger's resources and credit, "If you want a check cashed, I'm sending an oil cable this week and could have the boy who takes it get your money for you."

"Thanks very much, but I think I can manage. If not, and I'm too lazy to go myself, I'll be glad to have you do it for me."

MacGregor grunted shortly and made no further attempt just then to inquire into Charteris' private affairs.

As the faint clanking screech of a racing anchor-chain told them that the *Bonny* had reached her anchorage, Hogmanay was accompanying his visitor to the concrete breakwater which was the natives' landing-stage. The gig wharf was reserved for white visitors only, or for such colored potentates as Agwala, whose forty-paddle canoe always approached it with an impressive flourish, conferring great honor upon the gig wharf.

When Charteris had first arrived at the breakwater, he had created confusion and a chattering consternation among the native traders whose canoes were tied up there. They were not accustomed to white men traveling like a "so-so woman," and appearing in their midst in that fashion so casually. Now, as he came down the beach to depart, they huddled away in silent groups, watching him as if he were a new species.

But when MacGregor saw the size of the canoe which Charteris preferred to a launch, his jaw dropped.

"That—that thing! Is that what ye travel around in?"

"Why not?"

"But where do ye put your gear?"

"Don't carry enough to bother about. That's the simplest way."

Charteris stepped into the frail one-woman shell and picked up his single-bladed paddle as if the thing were a part of him.

"Thanks again for your invitation to use that extra room. I'll remember it if the cooking in Dowadda becomes too much for me."

"All right," doubtfully. "See that ye don't drown on the way back."

Hogmanay watched Charteris pilot his slender craft out of the ruck of canoes and the calm of the shallows into the rough of the swirling river. The natives standing by also looked on in dumb, sagging-jawed amaze as the queer white man, with apparently effortless ease, moved stroke by stroke up-stream, the little canoe bobbing and tossing like a cork without any appreciable effect upon the white man's mastery of it.

Then the blacks began to mutter among themselves, and Hogmanay, who knew enough Jakri and Sobo to understand the gist of what they said, lingered and learned that Charteris was not altogether a new experience to some of them.

He had come down from among the Igabo people, who evidently spoke of him in whispers, and he had passed like a wraith through the Sobo country in the vicinity of Bwallatown.

Vaguely, according to what Hogmanay gathered from the muttering round about him, Charteris was believed to have the wisdom of the tortoise, the stealth of the bush cat, and the mystical invisibility of the chameleon. He was known, simply enough, as "the gray man who never hurried."

MacGregor made no attempt to question any of his unsuspecting informants for more specific information. He knew the native too well for that. Had he given them an inkling of the fact that he was paying any attention to their chatter, their unbidden confidences would have been silenced instantly. Behind an inscrutable barrier of childlike simplicity and ignorance, their equally childlike conceptions of Charteris would have been as hard to achieve as the mysteries of their unnumbered gods.

In a few minutes, putting Charteris out of his thoughts for the time being, Hogmanay was stepping into the Marsden gig and was being rowed out to the *Bonny*, which lay at anchor in midstream, her nose swinging with the tide to point down river.

CHAPTER IV

TWO EVILS

FROM every standpoint of practical seaworthiness, the *Bonny* was all that a steam-yacht ought to be. She was not only good to look upon, but she was also efficient, comfortable, and altogether deserving of a sailorman's pride.

Manned, while in the tropics, by colored deck-hands who were uniformed in white drill, and officered by men from the Mersey and the Clyde—men who were capable of satisfying Hugh Morrison's standards of seamanship—she lacked nothing that was necessary to make her everything that Morrison expected from a property for the existence of which he was primarily responsible.

Cream white in color, her upper decks completely shaded by a white canvas awning, a wisp of smoke curling lazily from her smartly rakish funnel, she had the lean, sharp lines that spoke of speed, and she swayed jauntily against her stolid mangrove background something like a butterfly hovering in the vicinity of a dusty privet hedge.

When MacGregor's gig, heading well up-river, turned to slip down with the tide to the *Bonny's* lowered companion ladder, several figures lined the rail of the upper deck, either to observe his movements or to watch the dying sun drop like a plummet behind the encircling bush. When he set foot on the yacht's deck just a few minutes later, darkness had fallen, and he stepped into a blaze of electric light that made him blink. The figures he had seen clustering the rail were waiting for him.

Catherine Morrison, tall, slender and superior, soft brown of hair and eye, came forward with a sure, free swing in her step that told of golf and tennis and swimming and rowing, an intimate acquaintance with stirrups and a carefully careless hand upon a steering wheel of one kind or another. Her voice was mellow, firm and friendly.

"How do you do, Mr. MacGregor? I

am very glad to see you again. You are looking splendid!"

And she shook hands with him in the straight-from-the-shoulder manner that one expected of her, making no pretense of any kind. Catherine never had pretended at any time, not even in her doll days. A doll had been just a doll and a mudpie nothing more than that. Her life, therefore, had been built upon a reenforced concrete foundation, and there were no sandpits of illusion under her feet.

Elsie, her younger sister, an alluring, tumble-haired hoyden of nineteen, bubblingly called Hogmanay "Sandy," in imitation of her father; asked him about the identity of Margaret Jardine and Charteris, both of whom she had seen leaving the beach; inquired into the story that mosquitoes were more plentiful at Benin River than at Bakana; showed him her mosquito boots to prove that her nether extremities, at least, were prepared for them, and told him he was getting fat—without giving him a chance to say anything at all.

Tommy Dillingworth, who was Morrison's secretary and who had begun as an office boy in Marsden & Co.'s Liverpool office, said:

"Hello, Mac. Still alive?" in that nonchalant yet always apologetic way he had, as if he were being perpetually sorry for the fact that he was only Tommy Dillingworth and was doing his best to conceal it.

Then Catherine introduced the fourth member of the small, impromptu reception committee—a Miss Goddard—over whose small hand Hogmanay bowed almost cavalierly, and whose eyes, black as the depths of the creeper-covered *ju-ju* well behind Dowadda, gave him a sensation of being swallowed at a gulp. Just a handful of a woman she was, too, with straight, unruly black hair and a sharp, alive little face that was like a pane of translucent glass with a light behind it. Sparkling with the activity of the mind that provided the light, it revealed nothing but the vaguest of shadows.

"Just before we turned the corner down there, Cath and I saw the body of a man floating past—a black man," she informed him calmly. "I told Mr. Ellison, the first officer, about it, but he didn't seem to think it was anything to bother about. Isn't it?"

"Well—no—not for us anyway," Hogmanay answered, subconsciously looking around for a sign of Morrison as they walked toward a cluster of lights amidships where, just aft of the library and the saloon companion, there was a group of deck and Madeira chairs. "We haven't got that far yet. Of course, if there's a complaint brought to the government in cases of the kind, it acts on it, but otherwise we have to think it's an accident or just a way of burial."

"Oh, that's all right, then," Miss Goddard commented cheerfully. "I thought we might have to attend an inquest or something. Look at those moths and things around those lights. Good heavens, what a swarm!"

"Oh, let 'em all come," Elsie declared generously. "Any bats around here, Sandy?"

"Lots of them."

"Scrumptious! Everything spooky and dark, crocs pretending to be asleep on the mudbanks, leopards slinking through the bush, pythons slithering among the undergrowth making the monkeys shiver, and bats whizzing past your ears! What wouldn't I give to be a man!"

"Not a copper," Miss Goddard, who was better known to her intimates as Fran, declared unfeelingly. "You're too confoundedly fond of being pretty and girlish and of making men let you have your own way because you are just that."

"Beast!"

"Truth for all that. Playing at adventure from the deck of a nice, comfortable yacht is one thing. Really living it is quite another—rather drab and dirty and annoyingly inconvenient for the most part, I should think?"

The question mark was directed at Hogmanay.

"Well," noncommittally, "it's a matter of taste. But maybe some folks do get the best part o' their enjoyment of this kind o' adventurin' out of talking about it afterward. That's the way with a lot of things besides livin' out here. Ye never really enjoy it till it's over."

"I'm enjoying every minute of it!" Elsie asserted defiantly.

"Lives up to your expectations, does it?" MacGregor asked, and continued to stand, although the ladies had all found chairs.

"No it doesn't. Not yet. Down in Calabar and Opobo some of the traders wore boots and spats. Boots would have been bad enough, but spats, Sandy! Spats!

They don't do anything like that up here do they?"

"Not yet," MacGregor conceded with a grin. "Agwala tried to wear a pair of boots not long ago but gave them up as a bad job."

"Serves him right. I've waited all my life to see those people looking natural, and then I come out here and find them wearing spats and using sewing-machines."

"Won't you sit down?" Catherine asked from a deck chair as MacGregor hesitated.

"Well, I'm thinking I'd better see Hugh—your father—first."

"He's in the library, Mac," Tommy Dillingworth informed him. "And he did say you were to go in as soon as you came on board, but I thought I'd give us a minute or two to get a good look at you."

"All right," with just a trace of nervousness. "You'll—that is—you'll excuse me, ladies?"

"We will if you'll promise to stay to dinner," Catherine bartered.

"But I'm not dressed."

"Dressed, fiddlesticks," Elsie derided. "You haven't told me yet about the lady in the gig and the man in the little canoe, and you're not going ashore till you do. So that settles that."

Hogmanay smiled rather feebly, and then, mumbling a proper word of thanks for the invitation to dinner and glancing surreptitiously in the direction of the dim lights of the Jardine hulk, he turned almost diffidently toward the library to interview the one man on earth he unqualifiedly respected and—the truth is mighty—also feared.

HUGH MORRISON had no interest in the past and only a hurried, unflattering consciousness of the present. But he contemplated the future with a cold and calculating eye and spent a great deal of his time making sure that nothing would obscure his vision.

That he had begun his career in West African trade as a kernel clerk on Marsden & Co.'s Old Calabar trading factory, and that his first trip had come to an abrupt termination at the end of six months, when it had been found necessary to send him home literally packed in ice, was apparently no more worth remembering than anything that had followed.

He had recovered from that attack of blackwater, which he had regarded merely as an interruption, and had gone back to the sizzling, fever-haunted coast many times thereafter, until he had become first an agent, then agent-general, and, finally, a member of the firm. Whereupon, he began to look toward the future in real earnest.

Having conceived the idea of gathering together all of the Lower Niger trading interests there were, he had proceeded to combine them into one huge interest, the life-blood of which pulsated from the push-buttoned desk of Hugh Morrison.

It was not a new idea. Other men had done the same thing in other fields before he even thought of doing it in his, but the important fact was that, in the realm of West African trade, from Lagos to Old Calabar, the name of Hugh Morrison was as the name of a king.

He was seated before a small writing table hurriedly assimilating some trade reports when Hogmanay entered.

Everything Morrison did was done so that it would be out of the way as quickly as possible, although he himself did not give that impression to any one. Studied deliberation and a bloodless disregard for the passing of time or men were the attributes he was generally supposed to possess in excess of all others.

Familiar to every one who had ever come in contact with him was his trick of walking by himself—on the deck of a ship, a secluded stretch of a trading beach or house veranda, an unfrequented lane at home, or anywhere that gave him a like opportunity—when he would measure his steps as with a tape, clasp his hands behind him and whistle softly and, it must be admitted, unmusically, anything that happened to occur to him.

Men had been known to say that he was as devoid of a human impulse as his whistling was empty of tune.

He looked like that, too. Colorless, unresponsive and clothed with an odd kind of primness that made his stiff linen collar, white soft shirt, drill trousers and buckskin shoes seem like a uniform, his presence at the dining-table of any Marsden & Co. trading factory, made dinner a funereal affair for the great majority of agents and assistants alike.

"How are you, Sandy?" His eyes were on the trade reports he was putting aside when he said it, and as he rose and held out his hand, he did not smile. "You're looking well."

"So they've been tellin' me. You're lookin' fine yourself, Hugh."

Morrison paid no attention to that. He folded the reports he had been reading and put them back in the long envelope that had contained them, and, judging him simply by the painfully precise movements of his hands, it seemed incongruous that any one, and particularly one of his own agents, should call him by his first name.

"Sit down, Sandy," he invited, putting the envelope in the drawer of the desk. "How is the Agwala-Abado feud progressing?"

"Oh, about the same. Agwala's a big man and hard to make any kind o' impression on, but Abado is gettin' bigger every day. Sold me forty puncheons last week and thirty yesterday. That's a lot of money for a Sobo to turn over in seven days."

"Jardine getting any of it?"

"No."

"Koratown or Siluko?"

"Not as far as I know. Unless he's trading through his boys up there."

"He is."

"Is that a fact? How——"

"Agwala came all the way down to Forcados to tell me about it. He is beginning to be afraid that there are times when it may not be advisable to call a small-boy trader, even if he is only a Sobo, 'the son of the mother of pigs.' "

An unsmiling pause.

"Abado, for his own part, frankly believes he is another Nana. There is no doubt about that, though he has no intention of rebelling against the government as Nana did. He is too clever and too sensible to attempt anything so suicidal. But he thinks he is a better man than any Jakri alive, particularly Agwala, and one of these days he is going to make a decided stand against the necessity of having to bend the knee to the chief."

Hogmanay nodded.

"Aye, he doesn't like to have to do that. It goes against the grain."

"Agwala asked me to boycott the Sobo," Morrison volunteered, as if MacGregor had not spoken.

"He must be goin' daft!"

"No. It's just a fight to the death—literally—and neither wants to hang for the murder of the other. Agwala has, in point of fact, allowed Abado to live too long. He should have disposed of him when the thing could have been done without suspicion. Abado is too big now to be removed by other than natural causes, so Agwala comes to me. The government won't help him because it can't very well, but Marsden & Co. could if it would. You can see that, can't you?"

"Oh, of course. Abado has to have an outlet for his oil or he might as well shut up shop. But I could appreciate that angle better if Jardine and Siluko and Koratown were—well, somewhere else."

"Precisely. That is why Abado is trading through his boys at independent beaches. He is giving the Siluko and Koratown people just enough trade to encourage them to remain in business in case he needs them as an outlet for his total trade later on. And if Jardine did not have prejudices against gin and other things, he could lay the foundation of a comfortable little fortune as a result of Abado's extremity. Naturally, the Sobo would prefer to do business here, at Benin River, directly under Agwala's nose, than be compelled to makeshift at Siluko and Koratown. Is Jardine ready to sell yet?"

"No. He's hangin' on. Miss Jardine told me, just an hour ago, that he wasn't going to sell out. She wants to talk it over with you. Maybe if we increased our offer a bit——"

"The situation is briefly this," Morrison answered when his finger-tips were all joined so that his thumb rested on the knot of his prim bow tie. "Agwala frankly threatens to carry his trade to the independents. He will even go so far as to give them long enough credit to enable them to raise the money to pay for it if we don't boycott Abado."

"Eh? What's that? Credit?"

"Whether that idea of extending credit is Agwala's own," Morrison continued evenly, "or whether it was suggested to him by one or more of our competitors is not important. But the idea itself is remarkable enough to indicate just how serious Agwala really is."

"I never heard o' such a thing!"

"On the other hand, Abado's influence on Sobo trade, though not so great as Agwala's with the Jakri, is considerable enough to make it worth any white trader's while to continue to fight us. Consequently, we have to make a choice between them and follow it with measures to prevent Abado's oil and kernels and rubber from getting out of the country."

"You mean we are to stop buying from Abado and keep the Siluko and Koratown independents from gettin' ship room for their cargoes?"

"Of two evils always choose the lesser," Morrison said in the same even, unhurried voice. "Agwala is harmless if left alone. Abado is dangerous at any time—vindictive—given to remembering trifling hurts longer than is necessary. And his schemes of vengeance cannot be permitted to put our competitors in a stronger position."

"No—no—there's no doubt about that. But——"

"Beginning tomorrow morning, you will quote Abado prices at which he cannot afford to sell. If he accepts those prices, you may buy from him. Agwala understands that and has no objection to his rival doing business at a loss. The shipping matter will be attended to at Liverpool."

Hogmanay sat back in his chair mopping his forehead slowly. The little library, at once cozy and business-like and protected from mosquitoes and flies by wire screens, was hotter than usual. A peal of girlish laughter came from the deck and the flat-footed scuffling step of a deck-hand going aft died out whisperingly.

"According to the government," Morrison said and rose, "the Agwala-Abado affair is a tempest in a tea cup. And the government is right. Therefore, we cannot allow it to become anything more than that. You're going to stay and have dinner with us?"

MacGregor reached his feet mumbling something about already having been invited by Catherine.

"Could I—you know, of course, without me tellin' you, that you're doing a very dangerous thing," he exploded at last, dispensing with all cluttering preliminaries.

"Dangerous—to whom?"

"To everybody concerned. Abado is an ugly devil and twice as clever as Agwala."

Something akin to a smile betrayed itself about the corners of Morrison's mouth.

"That is why he must be suppressed."

CHAPTER V

"FROM GREENLAND'S ICY MOUNTAINS."

WHILE the *Bonny* was in the tropics and the weather of the tail end of the rainy season permitted it, dinner was served on deck at square, collapsible tables, seating four.

According to the number and character of the guests the tables increased, certain diners changed seats and sometimes two tables became one; but no one, to the best of Captain Walton's knowledge, had ever been slighted by being crowded away from Morrison's table to make room for a guest of honor.

Walton, the skipper of the *Bonny*, was a little man, fat and red of face, and his button eyes glistened expectantly upon a world that, he was thoroughly convinced, had little or no sense of humor.

Hogmanay was the only guest that evening, and he sat facing Catherine, who had sensibly decreed that, for the ladies at least, evening dress at Benin River would consist of a linen frock and a pair of mosquito boots. So that MacGregor, even if Morrison were punctiliously arrayed in a white flannel dinner suit, did not feel any more uncomfortable out of his "society clothes" than he did in them. Fran Goddard had the other seat at that table.

With unconcealed joy, Elsie had transferred herself to the captain's table, which was occupied also by Tommy Dillingworth and a tired-looking, slightly stooped-shouldered man with a drooping gray mustache. His name was Andy Graham and his occupation that of chief engineer. He had rarely been known to speak unless spoken to and Elsie liked him because he never contradicted her.

Ted Ellison, the chief officer; Gore, the second engineer, who was a studious-appearing young man; and Bennett, the second officer, a carelessly bulky personality who accumulated so many wrinkles in his white drill uniform that he resembled an accordion—completed the complement of white officers on the *Bonny*, but these three disposed of the business of eating in the saloon at such hours as their duties permitted.

On deck, a small army of colored stewards of Kroo persuasion served under the leadership of a mummified little countryman of their own from Grand Cess. He had been chief steward at Marsden & Co.'s Old Calabar factory when Morrison was an assistant there, and his face had shrunk in the interval. It reminded Hogmanay of a piece of dried mango bark and was capable of quite as much emotion. His name was Rattail.

Hogmanay did not enjoy his dinner that

evening. In spite of the unusual tinkle of ice in the glass at his elbow, there was too much on his mind for him to give serious consideration to his stomach.

Even the sparkling, irrepressible enthusiasm of Elsie, the somewhat mysterious fascination of Fran Goddard, the steadier glow of Catherine's quietly dominant personality or the humor of Captain Walton, which did not necessarily confine itself to his own table, could not relieve him of his burden of gloom.

There was trouble ahead and nothing short of a cataclysm could avoid it.

Abado, as savage as he was cunning and shrewd and far-seeing, was a Sobo to the very marrow of him, and he would not be in the least likely to go down to defeat without striking a few well-calculated blows in his own defense.

Against whom, in the frenzy of his impotence, he was likely to direct these blows, Hogmanay could guess with reasonable certainty, and he was sure that he, himself, would be unpleasantly close to the center of the rumpus.

Not that MacGregor disliked a fight or was afraid to engage in one under any rules. What he objected to, principally, was the prospect of being compelled to crush Abado simply because Agwala was too fat and too much afraid of the Sobo to fight his own battles.

Of course, Agwala was perfectly justified, in a war of the kind, to employ whatever weapons came to his hand. But Hogmanay resented being one of them.

When dinner was over, the tables cleared away, and the deck lights reduced to a minimum so that the moths and flies and mosquitoes would not have so much to attract them, Morrison went off for his customary after-dinner stroll between the corner of the library and the black bank of shadow under the bridge.

Whereupon, Elsie took possession of Hogmanay and insisted that he explain "the woman in the gig and the man in the little canoe."

For the benefit of the assembled company, MacGregor told as much as he cared to tell about Margaret, which was altogether favorable to her as a woman, but cannily noncommittal coming from him as a man.

"Oh, she must be splendid!" Elsie enthused.

"A splendid fool," Fran Goddard interjected. "Wasting her whole life for a stupid conception of duty. Doing the proper thing is all very well when the price isn't too high. But when virtue and so forth begin to exact—oh, confound those mosquitoes! Tommy, come and sit over here and blow smoke on me."

"Makes you wish you were a ham," Captain Walton declared puffing studiously upon a cigar.

"I'd like very much to meet Miss Jardine," Catherine said with a quietly genuine interest.

She sat in a shadow and Hogmanay could not see her face very well.

"Well, she's comin' with her father to see yours on a matter of business," he advised. "So you'll have a chance to meet her then. But maybe——"

"Oh, I know," Elsie broke in. "Dad and she are going to squabble about the price of palm oil and the inalienable rights—is that it?—of the independent thingamajigs. And then she'll hate us like the dickens and think we're a lot of thieves and prigs and——"

"I'll invite her to tiffin tomorrow," Catherine interrupted calmly. "A woman with her kind of grit is worth knowing. I hope she'll give us a chance to be nice to her while we're here."

"Would *you* if you were in her shoes?" Fran Goddard asked pointedly, and with her customary disregard for the proprieties.

She had been the equivalent to Catherine's right hand since their earliest schooldays and had always said what she pleased.

"I'll bet *I* wouldn't," Elsie decided emphatically. "I'd never even look at us!"

"It is just possible Miss Jardine may take the same attitude," Catherine said. "But, somehow, I hardly think so."

"Nevertheless, you are being very careful not to say what you would do," Fran persisted from behind a cloud of Tommy Dillingworth's cigaret smoke.

"I really don't know. Personally, I have no feeling in the matter at all."

"Of course not, you sweet, delightful child," Fran said in a sugary voice. "You don't have to have any. You're top dog. You can afford to be complacent. It's the Jardines who have to squirm and bite back if they want to get up again."

"Fran is a socialist or something," Catherine explained to Hogmanay simply, since he was obviously startled by the freedom of speech around him. "And Elsie is assimilating some of it. Tommy and Captain Walton, although they are saying nothing just at present, are really converts of Fran's. And Andy Graham, the chief engineer, who has sneaked off, I notice, to read Buckle or Hobbes or possibly 'The Stickit Minister,' is the only friend I've got, because, of course, Dad won't bother discussing anything with triflers.

"In other words—" in spite of interruptions from several quarters—"we are a happily argumentative family and get on each other's nerves most excitingly sometimes. And I must confess this is a delightful country to fight in. If you haven't got a fighting disposition, it will give you one quickly enough."

"Andy Graham agrees with her," Fran hastened to inform Hogmanay, "because he never disagrees with anybody. But if we were to dissect him, we'd probably find that his brain is a bomb with a time clock attachment. He'll go off some day and then Heaven knows what will happen."

Her small alert head jerked sideways to listen.

"What on earth is your father trying to whistle tonight?" she asked Elsie.

"It's supposed to be 'Greenland's Icy Mountains,'" Tommy Dillingworth told her, as the sound of Morrison's low, tuneless whistling drifted away from them toward the bridge again. "He's off key a bit but near enough to the truth to make it recognizable. There's something about Africa's sunny fountains rolling down golden sand in that hymn, isn't there? Where are the sunny fountains and the sand, Mac? All I've seen is bush and mud and dirty water."

"You mostly smell the rest of it," Walton added and laughed internally.

"Aye, I'll admit this part o' the country is kind o' disappointin'," MacGregor said as if he were apologizing for it. "I mind when I first landed at Bonny beach, I looked for sand and only found a bit of a lawn and a *chicoco* made clearing with ashes on top of it to keep a man from slippin'. But I got used to that and a lot of other misnamed things. It's not so bad though if you keep your wits about you."

"Who was the man in the little canoe?" Elsie asked for the third or fourth time.

"A stranger who calls himself Charteris," Hogmanay answered freely enough. "I don't know anything about him except that he's a young man with a gray head who prefers to live at Grandison's deserted beach and travel about in a one-woman canoe."

"Why? Hasn't he any business?" Catherine queried while the others tried to appreciate the phenomenon.

"Evidently not. He says he's just wanderin' about trying to do nothing as carefully as he can. Some of the natives, accordin' to what I heard them jabbering about him after he had left my beach this afternoon, call him the gray man who never hurries. He's a queer stick, but I can't say anything worse than that about him."

"Grandison's beach? Where's that?" Elsie asked and leaned forward in her chair as though to get a better view of MacGregor's face.

"Up there." Hogmanay indicated the direction with the stem of a bulldog briar pipe he had surreptitiously produced from the pocket of his voluminous blue serge coat.

"How far?"

"About two miles."

"We'd need the launch for that, wouldn't we, Tommy?"

Tommy Dillingworth nodded as a matter of course, but Catherine shook her head.

"You will see to it, captain, that they do not use the launch while we are here," she said quietly, and Walton looked as if he wished he were not the captain and gave all of his attention to the glowing end of his cigar.

"Why on earth not?" Elsie demanded. "He's only a man and Sandy says there is nothing vicious about him. If Fran goes with us, will that be all right?"

"No, it won't. Fran is just as scatterbrained about mysteries and tramps and unexplored territory as you are. If this man—Charteris, is that his name?—wants to become a part of the social whirl of Benin River, there's nothing to prevent him climbing our companion-ladder and presenting his card to the bosun. I wish you'd fill that pipe and light it, Mr. MacGregor. You'll be miserable until you do."

Her laughter had a soft, understanding sound, and Hogmanay was glad of the shadows as his free hand went obediently in search of his tobacco, which habit, strengthened by the compulsion of the climate, made him carry in a small flat tin of doubtful lineage.

He did not smoke a mixture. With a capable-looking knife, he cut several slices from a rope-like piece of tobacco that, in his native environment was familiarly called "thick black;" ground the slices into a state of utility between the palms of his huge, calloused hands and thereafter methodically filled his pipe.

The final result in the volume and power of the smoke made Tommy's cigaret and Walton's cigar grow pale by comparison. Hogmanay was not an immoderate smoker, but when he did smoke there was no doubt about it.

"Even if I have no consuming desire to meet this tramp person," Fran said filling a pause. "Why bring the habits of Mayfair or thereby into Benin River. People don't go about leaving calling cards in a swamp."

"Neither do people who have no visible means of support travel about the Delta in little bits of canoes and put up at deserted trading-beaches without being classed as doubtful. Don't talk rubbish, Fran. You know perfectly well the youngster can't be allowed to go."

"All right, Miss Guardian-of-our-sacred-persons. So be it. But I hope you are bothered with an impulse some day, and some one has the power to say you can't obey it. You never did have an impulse that wasn't permissible, and, of course, can't have any sympathy with Elsie, who's always having them, poor child!"

Whereupon everybody laughed, and when Walton suddenly discovered that there was something he wanted to say to his chief officer, Tommy Dillingworth took occasion to walk to the rail to throw the remnant of his cigaret overboard.

ON THE way, he passed Elsie's chair and, without looking at the girl, the tips of his fingers just barely brushed her arm. When he came back she waited until Hogmanay had finished saying something about Charteris probably preferring to hold aloof, then asked Tommy casually:

"Want to play me a game of penny Nap? These grown-ups would rather we children were amusing ourselves elsewhere anyway, and the library is mosquito proof."

Tommy, who was reputed for his willingness to oblige anybody at any time, thought it was not a bad idea, and, with appropriate apologies, they departed to the semi-seclusion of the library, entering it upon the side opposite to that on which Morrison walked the deck.

The light was out when they went in and Tommy exhibited no great haste in finding the switch. His arms enfolded Elsie simply but efficiently, and before he wasted any of that priceless minute in words, he kissed her as rapidly as the library clock ticked, and much more passionately. Then, in a hoarse whisper:

"You don't really care for Ellison! You're just playing with him because he is so confoundedly sure of himself!"

"Why, Tommy! I never even thought of him! He's only the chief officer!"

"Chief officer be hanged! He's a man and a darned good one, and you're anything but a snob. And when he's dressed up in that white uniform of his, any girl would be justified in losing her head. I saw you look at him this afternoon just after tiffin and there was something in your face when you looked away——"

Elsie laughed.

"Nonsense! Let's turn on the light or they'll be suspicious."

Tommy kissed her again as if he were thinking more of Ellison than of the task in hand, then grumblingly found the switch. After that, because the interior of the library was visible, through screen doors, from the deck on either side of it, they played penny Nap and discreetly held hands both under and over the table.

Morrison saw them there, but his whistling always gave them warning of his approach. They could hear it come and go, a drearily futile sound. But, as a matter of fact, he paid less attention to them than they did to him.

Somewhere in the vast record-house of his mind, Tommy Dillingworth was pigeon-holed as a young man who wrote letters for him and saved him the trouble of opening and classifying his mail. He had no interest in Tommy personally, and that his secretary was playing cards with his daughter in the library was an incident of no moment; a whim of Elsie's which had doubtless received the approval of Catherine, who was, by agreement, responsible to their mother for Elsie's conduct and well-being while away from home.

Tommy squeezed the girl's hand and whispered:

"Ellison's been growing on you ever since we reached the Coast. Of course, if you like him better than you do me, that's another matter. But you can't afford to trifle with a man like Ellison. He won't let you."

"Oh, rubbish! You're just insanely jealous and are seeing things that aren't there." She tried to draw her hand away but Tommy, whose love had a fatherly streak in it, held on. "Sh! Dad's coming back!"

Tommy released her hand then, and, listening, paid attention to his cards.

Morrison passed and re-passed the door on his measured journey from and to the bridge, but he did not even look in.

His whistling became fainter and fainter and then, in the black shadow of a lifeboat, it stopped abruptly in the middle of a bar.

He sank slowly to his knees.

Something slithered across the deck to the right of him, merged into the dark beyond the lifeboat, and passed soundlessly on.

He sprawled upon his face.

And that was the end of Hugh Morrison.

CHAPTER VI

NONI HAS POSSIBILITIES

IT HAD been the experience of Daniel Dane Parker, the provincial commissioner, that there was an explanation for everything in the Niger Delta save the mysterious suddenness with which certain white men had died. And the bigger the man, the greater, as a rule, was the mystery.

Consequently, several days later, when Parker—or the Great Dane, as he was familiarly known and referred to—sat in Hogmanay's office and tried to talk the matter of Hugh Morrison's death sanely over with the trader, it was a relief to be convinced finally that there was no mystery surrounding the manner of it.

The deed had been subtle only in the incredible silence and swiftness of its execution. Otherwise, it bore all the earmarks of deliberate murder, the details of which were simple, crude and unspeakably bloody. No one spoke of them now, except perhaps to ask if the weapon—a machete or cleaver or some such instrument—had yet been found.

Hogmanay still had a glazed look in his eye. He had slept but little since Elsie's unforgettable shriek had lifted Catherine, Fran Goddard and him from their deck chairs with such terrorizing effect; and from then on his world had whirled madly about in never ending circles and mostly upside down.

"Ye didn't hear that Catherine had changed her mind since last night, did ye?" he asked heavily of Parker who had just come from the yacht where Malkett, the provincial chief of police, had been quartered for the past three days.

"You mean about her determination to stay till we find the man who did it? No, I'm afraid she hasn't, judging by her attitude just before I came ashore. I understand she had a cable from her mother this morning ordering the *Bonny's* immediate return to England, but I saw no sign of the order being obeyed. We'll probably have to put her out, finally."

Hogmanay stroked his beard and nodded.

"Ye'll have to blow the *Bonny* out o' the water if ye ever try to make Catherine Morrison leave the country before she's seen the man hanged. Most folk didn't know it, but she thought there was no man quite the equal of her father, and I doubt if there was in this part o' the world."

Parker lighted a cigaret.

"I gathered as much when I took dinner with them at Forcados a week ago," he said and watched himself make smoke rings for a few long drawn-out seconds. "It's going to have a big effect on the trade situation, isn't it?"

"Hm—well, maybe."

Hogmanay took his pipe from his mouth, and put it aside in a convenient tray, as if he had tired of the consolation it offered.

He had known the Great Dane most of his West African life, and they had been particularly intimate when Parker had been district commissioner at Segwanga. Since the latter had been appointed provincial commissioner, with headquarters at Warri, they had, of course, less opportunity for meeting, but their respect for each other had not diminished in the least.

Parker was everything his most popular nickname implied; big to the point of massiveness, altogether capable and efficient, and among his subordinates it was said that it was not good to discover the exact color of his eyes, or to compel him to assume an air of authority. He did not like to give orders, but there was a mountain of trouble and unpleasantness ready to fall upon the man who chose to take too lightly any of his slightly drawled requests.

"Been talking to Margaret Jardine?" Hogmanay asked, when he had thought it over.

"Not I. It just seemed to me—and, of course, there's a lot of talk floating up and down these rivers—that Morrison was the master hand, and that his going was likely to precipitate a crisis among your people. If there isn't anybody to take his place——"

"If!"

Hogmanay, slumped in his chair before his desk, sat bolt upright then.

"Ye make me doubt the government's wisdom in promoting you. You know fine that there's not another man in this business that has the grip on it that Hugh Morrison had. The king is dead, and he has no heir. That's the size of that."

"I thought so," quietly. "That's Abado who is waiting for you at the top of the stairs, isn't it?"

"Aye. That's him. Did Malkett get any leads out of Agwala?"

Parker made some more smoke rings. It was customary, in cases of the sort, for the government to look toward the most influential chiefs in the community for information and assistance that would be helpful. Sometimes this procedure developed tangible results, but, for the greater part, black concealed black wherever possible, and Malkett, the provincial chief of police, had had an interview with Agwala that had been most unsatisfactory. The Great Dane, however, had no intention of admitting it just yet.

"Agwala isn't ready to say very much. Like most of the rest of us, he hasn't had time to get his breath. But it doesn't seem to me, old man, that you are being quite as frank as you might be."

"Me?"

Parker nodded.

"Why does Abado hang around your doorstep, day after day, as he is doing now?"

"How many days has he been here?" Hogmanay asked, as if he really did not know.

"Five, isn't it? Ever since the morning after it happened?"

"Meanin' that you've been watchin' him pretty closely. What for?"

"That isn't the point. What I'm after is his reason for staying so long. I know Abado well enough to know that he hasn't that much time to waste."

"You mean that Arthur Bark, your underdone special agent, knows it and told you so?"

A steward entered with the drinks and Hogmanay waved him toward his visitor. When the boy had served them both and departed, they said "Chin chin," as a matter of course, and drank. Then MacGregor added.

"I've noticed that Bark has been flatterin' my beach with a lot o' attention for the past few days, and I hope he finds somebody on it we'll have some justifeecation for hangin'. If he can do that, I'll forgive him for bein' a better educated man than I am. Is he on the beach now?"

"I think so. Why?"

"I was goin' to suggest that we bring Abado in here and use Bark as an interpreter. There are two or three questions I'd like to ask Abado, mysel', and the presence o' the government might make him loosen his tongue."

"No—not yet. We're not interested in him to that extent. But I should like to know why he persists in hanging on here?"

"Simple enough. He has his mind on a price for his oil that I won't pay him, and he's waiting to see if the sight of thirty puncheons won't make me change my mind."

"I see. And there isn't any chance of the price being—too low?"

Hogmanay picked up his pipe again, looked around his desk for the match box and grumbled.

"The price of oil is never too low."

"But lower, in Abado's case, than usual?"

Hogmanay grinned.

"Now, I didn't think Abado would go yelpin' to Bark with a story like that," he said, as if Abado's tactics had disappointed him. "The truth is, Abado was getting to be too high priced, and we were minded to cut him down a bit. If he doesn't like our feegures, why doesn't he take his oil to the Koratown or Siluko firms. They'll buy it."

Parker sipped his whisky-and-soda, put the glass down on the desk and leaned toward Hogmanay with a deliberation that indicated an intention to speak plainly.

"It is never good business, Mac, for a white man to get himself mixed up in a black man's quarrel."

"No. Ye're right there," Hogmanay

agreed blandly. "Or rather, Bark is. I wish you'd bring the man up here and let me talk to him."

"You can talk to him as much as you please when I'm not here," Parker conceded. "This conversation is strictly between you and me, and I want to know if there is any truth in the story that you were going to boycott Abado in favor of Agwala?"

"Boycott! That's an ugly word. No, we were not going to do that."

"Then what were you going to do to him? What was Morrison's decision after he and Agwala had talked the situation over at Forcados?"

MacGregor's eyebrows lifted in mock surprize. He knew that he was playing a losing hand, but disloyalty to Morrison's last confidence, whatever he might have thought of it personally, never even occurred to him.

"Bark's been a busy wee man, hasn't he? But I'm afraid he is off the track there. What did Agwala have to say for himself?"

Parker rose.

"That's beside the question, Mac. I asked you what Morrison's decision was, after he had talked to Agwala, and I expect you to answer me, if you can."

"Then you're expectin' too much," MacGregor declared calmly. "Finish your drink and have another. This is beginnin' to get interestin'. Bark doesn't know what Agwala said to Morrison at Forcados?"

"Bark doesn't know a —— thing about it. Our information doesn't come from him, at least—" Parker hesitated, obviously turned his thoughts rapidly over in his mind; then abruptly asking Hogmanay to "wait a minute," strode out to the veranda and looked out on the river.

When he came back, his attitude of impatience had left him.

"All right, Mac. Let's have that other drink. Miss Jardine is on her way to the yacht with the girl now."

"Eh? What's that?"

"We'll have time for that drink if you hurry it," Parker declared. "How much do you know about the fellow who is putting up at Grandison's place?"

Hogmanay rose, called a boy and ordered the drinks before he made any effort to answer.

"Just a minute. One thing at a time. What is Margaret Jardine goin' to the yacht for and who is the girl she is takin' with her?"

"You'll find that out when you get there. But I'd like to warn you in advance that we are going to have an open-and-above-board discussion about this business; whole truth and nothing but the truth sort of thing. Of course, I'll admit it doesn't give you an awful lot of time in which to become honest, but I've got to get back to Warri by tomorrow morning and——"

"Stop bletherin' and tell me what ye mean. It's not possible that you've actually——"

"Not a word, Mac, till we hear what the girl has to say."

"Girl! What girl?"

"Good Lord! You don't expect me to remember the name of every black female in the Delta, do you?"

"Oh! She's black is she?"

"Of course. There aren't two white women on the hulk, are there?"

"Ye didn't say where she was comin' from," MacGregor mumbled, as the Krooboy steward came in again; then, when the boy had gone, he asked, "Are ye speakin' about Margaret's girl—Noni?"

Parker looked over the top of his glass. "Is that her name? Pretty, isn't it? Chin chin."

Hogmanay snorted, hesitated a few seconds as if he would ask some more questions, then, emptying his glass without further ado, passed into his bedroom and secured his sun-helmet.

"Whenever you are ready, I am," he said as he reentered the office. "What have ye got on your mind about the Charteris man?"

"Charteris?"

"The man who is stopping at Grandison's beach. He said he met ye once."

"Did he? I don't remember."

"Young man—silver-gray hair—travels in a one-woman canoe. He isn't the kind of man ye'd be likely to forget if ye ever did meet him."

"Malkett gave me his description," Parker admitted, and appeared to be trying to jog his memory. "No, I never met him. Wonder why he lied about it. I'll look him up when we are finished talking to the girl."

THE LED the way out of the office on to the veranda and toward the stairs where, on the top step, with his hands clasped over the crown of his woolly head, Abado sat in silent solitude, gazing straight into nothingness.

His eyes had no life in them, and his expression was that of a man who is faced with a kind of disaster that can no longer be put into words. The extent of his dejection was indicated most eloquently in the fact that his clothing was reduced to a loin cloth and that, in his hour of promised defeat, he was alone. Not because his boys or his sons or his women had deserted him; simply that he preferred it that way.

He did not rise until Hogmanay and the Great Dane stood immediately behind him. Then, at a word from MacGregor, he shuffled to his feet, the magnificence of his straight, ordinarily shiny black body minimized and dulled by the depression that was upon him.

"What's matter, Abado?" Hogmanay asked, simply for the sake of saying something. "You no hoist that oil yet?"

Abado smiled; and when he did it, both MacGregor and the provincial commissioner saw that his lips were dry to the point of cracking, and that they were coated with a dusty-looking froth as if he had taken neither food nor drink for a longer time than was good for any man.

"Canoe live. Oil live. All Abado man live. Them time I die, all go 'way. Be so Abado speak."

Even to Parker the croaking speech was somewhat cryptic, but Hogmanay understood it perfectly, because he knew whither the Sobo's mind had been drifting for the past twenty-four hours.

Literally, it meant that Abado's canoes and oil and boys would remain at Marsden's beach until Abado died. Then they would take his body and go away.

From which solemn prophecy the Sobo evidently intended MacGregor to get the impression that, big and ambitious as he, Abado, was, he had decided that since the white man had entered the fight against him, there was nothing left for him to do but to die.

This he was forthwith proceeding to accomplish by the simple, if rather long-drawn-out act of declining to eat or to drink, and by literally refusing to breathe. That is, he held his breath as long as possible at frequent intervals, which, in conjunction with starvation, was a legitimate method of suicide, having no effect upon the future status of the soul, such as death by any form of self-inflicted mutilation of the body would have had.

Hogmanay knew the queerly twisted native mind well enough to realize that once such a conviction took possession of it, neither the intervention of witch-doctors nor incantations to the ancestral gods were potent enough to drive it out.

But that phase of native pyschology, in a man of Abado's mental stature, was incredible; something Hogmanay had not considered as a possibility even for a moment.

It suggested either that Abado had interpreted the writing on the wall correctly, and had at once admitted the futility of pitting his strength against the white man, or, it meant simply that he was clever enough to adopt such a pose to screen his real intentions in the immediate future. Without arguing the matter, Hogmanay chose to believe the latter for the time being.

"I come back little bit. Wait."

Abado shrugged his shoulders, glanced glassily in the direction of the provincial commissioner, then sat slowly down again, clasping his hands on the crown of his head as before.

Hogmanay and Parker passed on without further comment and presently, after the trader had advised his shop clerk that he was going on board the yacht, and would probably not be back in time for eleven o'clock breakfast, they went down to the gig-wharf where the commissioner's launch was tied up.

"Decided to die, has he?" the Great Dane asked as he stepped on board in MacGregor's wake.

"Something like that," Hogmanay answered absently, mopping the back of his neck. "Hullo, Arthur. Ye're a hard man to lose. Found anybody to hang yet? When you do, I hope ye'll remember that I've got two good mango trees on my beach."

Arthur Garriman Bark—and he was particular about the use of his full name—emerged from the launch's little cabin, expressing himself sartorially in the blue uniform of the police, which was assisted by highly polished brown leggings and boots and a light but serviceable sun-helmet.

He did not really need a sun-helmet. Though his education had been well attended to, it had not affected the pigment of his skin which, on his mother's side, at least, obviated the necessity for any kind of head-covering.

In the presence of white men, Arthur was a gentleman, respectful and likeable. His only vices, in Hogmanay's estimation, were his professorial diction and his comparative uselessness as a "special agent" when a Jakri of family was involved. Otherwise, he could be depended upon to cover himself with glory and, in the majority of cases, was a helpful member of Malkett's staff.

"Good morning, Mr. MacGregor," he greeted Hogmanay politely, after saluting the provincial commissioner in his best manner. "I regret that I have not yet found any one who merits hanging, but the chase has only begun, and you can be assured that we are leaving no stone unturned——"

"All right, Bark," Parker interrupted mildly as the colored engineer steered the launch carefully away from the wharf. "We'll get your story later."

Not at all abashed, Arthur murmured a respectful "very good, sir," saluted again, and retired aft.

Hogmanay glanced toward the yacht and saw Margaret and Noni climbing the companion ladder. Catherine Morrison and some one who looked like Tommy Dillingworth stood at the top awaiting them, and as MacGregor's attention shifted casually up-river, he observed a one-woman canoe idling its way down-stream in the shadow of the overhanging mangroves.

"There's your Charteris man, now," he said, nudging Parker's arm. "See him? Huggin' the bush over there in that skelf of a canoe of his?"

"I see him," the Great Dane admitted after a moment or two. "—— of a way for a white man to travel. Wonder why he said he— What's he doing now? Looks as if he were going to join us."

CHAPTER VII

THE REST HOUSE AT ILANI

BY VIRTUE of greater speed and a steering wheel, the launch reached the yacht far enough ahead of Charteris to enable Hogmanay to watch, from the rail of the upper deck, the sure, masterly fashion in which the unexpected visitor measured the speed of the tide and brought his trifling craft alongside the companion ladder.

There was no hesitancy in Charteris' manner of accomplishing the trick, which, on the Benin River, and particularly in a one-woman canoe, was a trick worthy of any waterman's undivided attention. In fact, without any suggestion of performing for the benefit of the gallery, Charteris made the thing seem ridiculously simple, thereby imprinting upon it the hall-mark that signifies perfection in any art.

Farther along the rail, Elsie, Fran Goddard and Tommy Dillingworth also watched; Elsie still somewhat white and drawn and with a trace of the horror she had been the first to look upon, lurking like an uneasy shadow in her eyes.

The provincial commissioner and Malkett were closeted in the library, and Bark was loitering outside the starboard door, while two Hausa policemen solemnly patroled the deck on either side. The yacht's officers and crew moved about as if on tiptoe, and Margaret Jardine and Catherine sat in the "square," aft of the library and talked in monotones.

It was not Margaret's first visit to the yacht. When the news of the tragedy had reached her, less than an hour after it had occurred, she had lost no time in speeding to the assistance of her white sisters who were so desperately stricken in such a place and situation as that.

She had taken Elsie and her hysteria off Catherine's hands, had quieted Fran Goddard's equally hysterical obsession to go off in the launch and "hunt for the devil who did it," and had made it possible for Catherine to refrain from attending the funeral.

That, as Margaret knew only too well, would have been quite as bad as the moment of finding the body. So they had allowed the men to attend to that, and Margaret had remained on board the yacht till the evening of the following day.

By that time Elsie was quite sure she loved her better than any other woman she had ever known; Fran Goddard thought she was a gem, even if she were a "horrible ninny" to waste her life on a mistaken sense of duty, and Catherine had said, when Margaret was leaving the yacht that evening:

"Thank you very much. I'd like to come to tiffin some time if you'd let me. Just you and I. The day after to-morrow?"

Even with her father and the hulk's quality of hospitality poignantly on her mind, Margaret had not hesitated a moment.

"Oh, I wish you would."

Catherine had enjoyed herself, too, though Bart Jardine's dead blue eyes and scrawny neck seemed to appear around unexpected corners at unexpected moments all the while she was there. Bart had not forbidden the guest, but he had refused to be introduced to her. That was a part of his creed— "To —— with the Morrisons"—and he stuck to it.

Margaret's presence on board the yacht on this occasion had no social significance, but she was none the less welcome on that account. In fact, from Catherine's viewpoint, her importance in the Morrison scheme of things had increased, and every now and then Catherine would glance speculatively in Noni's direction, wondering what on earth a mere child such as she was could possibly have to do with so horrible a crime.

Noni, just then, was not committing herself. Squatting tailorwise on the deck to the right of Margaret's chair, she was apparently giving all of her attention to the gaudy silk handkerchief she wore about her crinkly head, and what other use she had for her eyes was dedicated surreptitiously to the immaculately uniformed figure of Arthur Garriman Bark.

Hogmanay, constituting himself a committee of one, met Charteris at the top of the companion ladder, and the first circumstance that MacGregor took note of, was that there was no alteration in Charteris's general appearance; that is, he had made no concessions in the matter of dress to do honor to the occasion.

And though, the moment he stepped on deck, and particularly when he passed under the awning and tucked his battered sun-helmet under his arm, he was immediately the center of attraction for all eyes, he betrayed not the slightest perturbation or any interest in anything save the business of shaking hands with Hogmanay.

"Perhaps I should have come down sooner than this," he said by way of apology. "But I found I had to go to Burutu after all and just got back last night. I hope Malkett's had some luck with his investigations?"

"No," heavily. "At least, I don't think he's found anything that'll do him much good. Have ye heard any whisperin's yoursel'? Wanderin' about the way you do, I'd think ye'd hear a lot o' interestin' things that weren't meant for publeecation."

"Nothing of any moment. But I do think you are making a mistake in thinking that Abado isn't serious."

Hogmanay smothered an exclamation, hesitated a moment or two, then, dabbing his forehead and face with his handkerchief as an aid to the concealment of his surprize, he said abruptly—

"I'll introduce ye to Miss Morrison."

And without further ado he led the way to Catherine Morrison's chair and performed the introduction in a tone that still hinted at his impatience with his astonishment.

Charteris accepted Catherine with the same courteous, yet matter-of-fact calm that, in all things and upon all occasions, appeared to mark him the complete master of himself. Apparently, it was not at all difficult for him to meet ladies of any degree, under any circumstances, and the fact that there was nothing exaggerated or stilted about his mannerisms in moments of the sort, defined his antecedents with reasonable accuracy.

Even Hogmanay knew that, and Margaret, who rose to shake hands with him and to ask him, with a smile, how he had found the cooking at Dowadda, felt convinced that, although his friendly attitude toward all sorts and conditions of men was something of a pose, there was nothing borrowed or assumed in the frankly simple ease with which he made himself at home.

Elsie and Fran and Tommy Dillingworth were introduced in turn and, except for the fact that Elsie was obviously impressed by the glamor that surrounded Charteris' personal appearance and the mystery of his mode of living, the event was important only in respect to the circumstance that it happened at all.

It was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the approach of Malkett, who introduced himself after his own fashion. He was a typical policeman, heavy of body and correspondingly sluggish in everything but eye and tongue.

"Pardon me." The apology included everybody, but his blunt-tipped fingers rested on Charteris' arm. "The provincial commissioner would like to talk to you."

"Certainly. Where shall I find him?"

"I'll show you."

"Thanks."

Charteris made his excuses to the rather tensely puzzled group around him and followed Malkett to the door of the library, where the provincial chief of police stepped aside to allow him to enter, but did not follow after. The screen door closed behind Charteris and Malkett walked up the deck to join the others.

Seated at the small library desk, the Great Dane waved Charteris to a chair with an air of authority that was unusual in him.

"Sit down."

"Thank you."

"Your name Charteris?"

"It is."

"I understand that you have no official business and that you are living at Grandison's deserted trading beach?"

Charteris inclined his head.

"Any credentials?"

"No," as if it were of no importance in any case.

Parker paused, glanced at the blotter before him, then asked.

"You cashed a draft at the Burutu bank two days ago?"

"I did."

"Drawn on a London bank, wasn't it?"

"No. Lagos."

"You have an account in the Bank of West Africa at Lagos in your own name?"

"I'm afraid they wouldn't let me have any money if I hadn't. Bank cashiers, out here, are more suspicious than trading agents or the government treasury department."

"I see. But doesn't it occur to you that you give considerable grounds for suspicions? Particularly when you declare to friends of mine that you have met me before?"

"Haven't I?"

In that moment, and with a suddenness that astonished him, the Great Dane knew that he had lost his grip on the situation.

He did not know why, but the quiet indifference in the other man's eyes made it plain to him that Charteris had told Hogmanay the truth, and that it was he, Parker, who was at fault.

Because it was impossible that he could have met Charteris at any time and not remembered him at once, he became somewhat flustered, and for a few seconds was unable to articulate the question that most naturally presented itself.

"I have met you before?" he managed at last.

"I did not say that."

"You told MacGregor that you had met me."

"Exactly. I met *you*. You did not see me. Or if you chanced to open your eyes, you were in no frame of mind to recollect the fact."

Parker's hand groped for the tin of cigarets on the desk while he studied Charteris' face in amazement.

"When was that—and where?"

"December, three or more years ago, in the rest-house at Ilani in Kwali country."

Parker grinned dubiously. The joke, he felt sure, was going to be at his expense, and he was preparing himself to make the best of it.

"I know the rest-house at Ilani. The roof leaks like a fishing net and you find cobras and things all over the place whether you drink Scotch or lime juice."

"It wasn't raining that night," Charteris said quietly. "But it was the Harmattan season and the temperature had dropped, as usual, quite suddenly."

He paused as if to give the provincial commissioner a further opportunity to jog his memory, but without result.

"All right. What next?"

"Your carriers had evidently deserted you, or had had too much gin or palm wine. In any case, I thought you'd stand a smaller chance of contracting blackwater if I picked you up and put you to bed properly."

"Properly!" The Great Dane echoed the word rather stupidly. "Where was I?"

"On the floor, principally. And that reminds me that you should have a blanket about you that does not belong to you. Are you going to offer me one of those cigarets? I think we'd both feel better if you did."

Daniel Dane Parker said nothing at all; simply held out the cigaret tin and allowed Charteris to take one.

Three years before, his mental equilibrium had been seriously threatened by the fact that a lady, in whom he had been more than interested, had decided that a lawyer who spent eleven months out of the twelve at home, was more desirable than a man who took his life in his hands twelve months out of every seventeen.

His cigaret was almost half finished before he said simply:

"I remember the blanket. Wondered where it came from. Glad you took care of me. Good of you. Thanks."

And that was all either of them ever said in reference to the rest-house at Ilani.

CHAPTER VIII

INTERLUDE

WHEN Charteris emerged from the library he was greeted by a hushed expectancy, every member of the group in "the square" having his or her own conception of the official character of his interview with the provincial commissioner. He acknowledged Elsie's doubtful but friendly little smile, then said to Malkett:

"The commissioner is all ready. He said you'd know what he meant by that." His glance shifted to Catherine. "I'd like to wait, if I may, till my friend MacGregor goes ashore?"

Catherine was not aware of it, but both Margaret and Fran Goddard saw her eyes waver, and her reply lacked not a little of her customary sureness.

"Why—yes—I hope you will. Mr. MacGregor is going to stay to lunch." She looked toward Hogmanay as if she insisted upon it. "Aren't you?"

Hogmanay admitted that, since she put it that way, he probably would, and Charteris, much to Margaret Jardine's surprize, said most agreeably.

"I'm glad of that. Dowadda cooking is nourishing enough but it's lean in originality."

Malkett touched Margaret's arm just then, indicated Noni with a glance, and, getting the attention of Hogmanay and Catherine in a similar manner, led them, shrouded in a beloved atmosphere of secrecy, into the library.

"Feels spooky even in the daytime," Elsie said nervously to Charteris, and hoped he would occupy the empty chair beside her own. "Everybody tiptoeing about like that and speaking in whispers makes me think of—of a cemetery."

"You mean a seminary," Tommy Dillingworth said hurriedly, because he knew Elsie had not wanted to say "cemetery" or even to think of one.

"Bright child," Fran Goddard approved, and she appeared to be the least impressed by the circumstance of the mysterious stranger's presence among them. "Won't you decide where you are going to sit, Mr. Charteris?"

"Oh—thanks," somewhat absently, his glance coming abruptly away from the direction of Marsden & Co.'s canoe-haunted breakwater. "This will do nicely."

And as he chose the deck chair Elsie hoped he would, he said:

"Whispering and going on tiptoe are indispensable aids toward bolstering one's sense of one's own importance. All really great men are secretive. They have to be. The more a man takes the world into his confidence, the less it is sure to think of him."

"Is that why you are so mysteriously secretive?" Fran asked bluntly. "And live as you do do just to make people wonder and imagine all sort of tremendous things about you?"

"Do they? I'm glad to know that. But they'll think differently tomorrow."

"Why tomorrow?" Elsie asked quickly.

"Because they always do. People never think quite as much or as little of anything today as they did yesterday."

"That sounds as if you had been disappointed in love or war or something," Fran declared, and the black pools of her eyes became deeper. "Your motives are not so ordinary as that, are they?"

"Fran!" Elsie protested, apologizing to Charteris with a look, and Tommy Dillingworth produced his cigaret case in support of the apology.

Charteris declined the invitation with a gesture that dismissed but did not belittle the courtesy.

"No, I regret that I have never been disappointed in anything in particular. If I have any motives at all, you can rest assured that they are much more ordinary than that."

"I don't believe it. You're just pretending to be simple and unimportant and unmotivated because you want us to think the opposite. Something like our own Tommy Dillingworth here. He always looks so terribly sorry that he happens to be alive to bother about, that he makes the uninitiated say at once, 'Oh, isn't he a nice young man!' Well, he may be, but he'll have to live a while longer to prove it to me!"

"That makes us partners, Dillingworth," Charteris said as Tommy, mopping his forehead, searched for words, and Elsie laughed, then hastened to say:

"You mustn't take Fran too seriously. She's really not as disagreeable as she pretends to be."

"That's a libel. I mean every word of it."

"Of course, you do," Charteris conceded

in a soft voice. "You have a remarkable eye—and mouth. All of your personality is in them."

Fran's slender little body stiffened.

"Nothing of the sort," she said shortly, and looked out beyond the rail in the general direction of the somber, sun-flayed hulk. "Ugh! Every time I look at that thing I feel as if a bit of ice were dropped down my back."

"Ought to look at it often then," Tommy inserted, hoping to relieve the situation. "Keep you cool."

Fran swept the joke aside as being unworthy of any consideration.

"Might as well ask me to stand gaping at the Funchal beggars and their horrible open sores, just to prove to myself how nice it is to be clean." Then to Charteris abruptly, "Why are you staying at Grandison's?"

"Because it still has a roof over it."

"Really!"

Fran's sneer was not so veiled as she would have liked it to be. Obviously, Charteris's soft-voiced reference to her eyes and mouth had irritated her, and the gnawing heat of the day, the excitement and mystery that had been all about them for the better part of a week, had not improved her temper.

"Assuming from that, that you don't want to tell the truth about it, I don't suppose it's a bit of use asking what it was that turned your hair gray so young?"

"Fran!" Elsie gasped.

"Oh, rubbish! If a man insists upon posing as a freak, he must expect to be asked impertinent questions."

Charteris tilted his head a little and laughed, a low, clear sound that approved and yet infuriated. Tommy Dillingworth smiled, but he knew that Elsie was being momently hypnotized by the fascinating grandeur of Charteris' mystery. He was something new, something with a touch of awe, and Tommy admitted that the "queer devil" was handsome and spectacular enough to satisfy even Elsie's taste for the unusual.

Rattail, the wizened little chief steward, passed up the deck just then and when he cast a sidelong glance at Charteris, his step quickened perceptibly.

He was followed more leisurely by Ted Ellison, but Tommy derived no great satisfaction from the fact that Elsie was too busy watching Charteris to have eyes for the attractively uniformed figure of the first officer.

"Hair dye did it," Charteris declared, as if he actually expected to be believed.

Then his eyes lifted lazily and met those of Arthur Garriman Bark, who had just emerged from the library.

"Hello, Bark. Want me?"

"No, sir." It was apparent that Bark was not anxious to approach any nearer. "The provincial commissioner would like to speak to Mr. Dillingworth."

Tommy made his excuses and departed, and Fran immediately asked.

"Why was that fellow afraid of you?"

"Was he?"

"Obviously. If you had risen to your feet he would have bolted. I'm sure of it. And that's sheer nonsense on the face of it. Why and what are you that white people know you so little and black people so much?"

"I never really tried to find out. Think you can solve the mystery for me?"

Elsie smiled, but Fran rose and walked to the rail, ostensibly to get a better view of the stern-wheeler that was coming round the Koratown curve from Sapeli; actually to get away from the glint of edged steel that had crept into Charteris' clear blue eyes. Not that it frightened her; simply, that it made her shrink from it as from a naked razor blade.

Apparently, Elsie was not aware of any such repellent sign or circumstance. True, she did not look directly at Charteris often, but she lost little time in plying him with questions relative to the queer and terrible things she had heard or read about.

Charteris did not seem averse to being interrogated, so long as Elsie worded her questions impersonally, but after a while she discovered that he was simply confirming what she already knew, without adding anything to her stock of information.

Also, he did not appear to think that the horrible practises of the natives were worth the trouble of condemnation in any case.

"But cannibalism—the execution of captives and the dreadful women who dance back to their huts rolling the heads of the victims along the ground! Ugh! That is just plain savagery, isn't it?"

"It isn't very plain," Charteris said with a wry smile. "Rather fancy savagery, I should say."

"Then why do you make excuses for them?"

"Because these poor beggars, just like the rest of us, are blessed or cursed with a point of view."

"No point of view can possibly make right out of that kind of wrong."

Charteris smiled as if he knew differently, but made no comment. So Elsie asked challengingly—

"Well, how can it?"

"Simply enough."

Charteris glanced in Fran Goddard's direction, then added, as though he were not particularly interested in the subject:

"You see, when you believe in slavery, and also believe that life in the hereafter is the same as it is on earth, you've got to think of some way of supplying yourself with slaves who will cross the border with you or be waiting there for you when you do go over. The safest way, of course, is to have the slaves buried with you—which accounts for human sacrifice on the death of a chief. Another way is to drink the blood of your enemy and eat his flesh to completely vanquish his soul."

"That's awful!"

"And that, to some extent, explains cannibalism. The ladies who go into ecstasies over the head of a decapitated enemy, are simply expressing their approval of another soul made eternally captive for the honor of their house."

Elsie considered that a moment or two, valiantly suppressing a shudder. She was astonished, too, that Charteris had said so much.

Charteris saw Fran move away from the rail as the stern-wheeler churned past, and he noted that she was going to join them again with an obvious intention of being as disagreeable as possible.

"What are you doing?" she asked as she came toward them. "Filling that child's head with a lot of ghost stories so that she won't sleep for a week?"

"No. I was just going to say that the point of view is the only thing that excuses anything, from capital punishment, wife-beating and anarchism, to wearing earrings, filing the teeth or eating raw oysters."

His glance went past Fran quickly.

"What's wrong, Dillingworth? You look as if you had had an unpleasant time of it."

Tommy, who had just come out of the library, mumbled something unintelligible, and went directly toward Elsie.

"They—Parker and Malkett—want you in there," he said as if it were his fault. "I tried to tell them that I thought you'd rather not, but——"

"I'm not going!" Elsie exclaimed, rising quickly to her feet as if she were prepared to bolt, and it was at once apparent that she shrank from the possible ordeal of having to recount the story of the finding of her father's body.

"Certainly not," Fran agreed without respect for authority. "What on earth do they want you in there for?"

Elsie suddenly found the tips of Charteris' fingers on her arm.

"Better get it over with," he said in a low voice. "I'll take you in. Nothing to be afraid of at all."

The girl's eyes widened and wavered, but the protest that sprang to her lips died there. And then, for some reason or other, she was smiling; weakly, it is true, yet smiling.

"Yes. Things—always—they always get worse if you stop to think about them. Let's go in and get it over with."

In something less than a minute Fran Goddard was looking expressively at Tommy Dillingworth, who was dazedly returning the compliment.

"Say,'Damn,'Tommy," Fran encouraged. "You'll feel better."

Tommy looked frightened.

"Why—why should I say anything?"

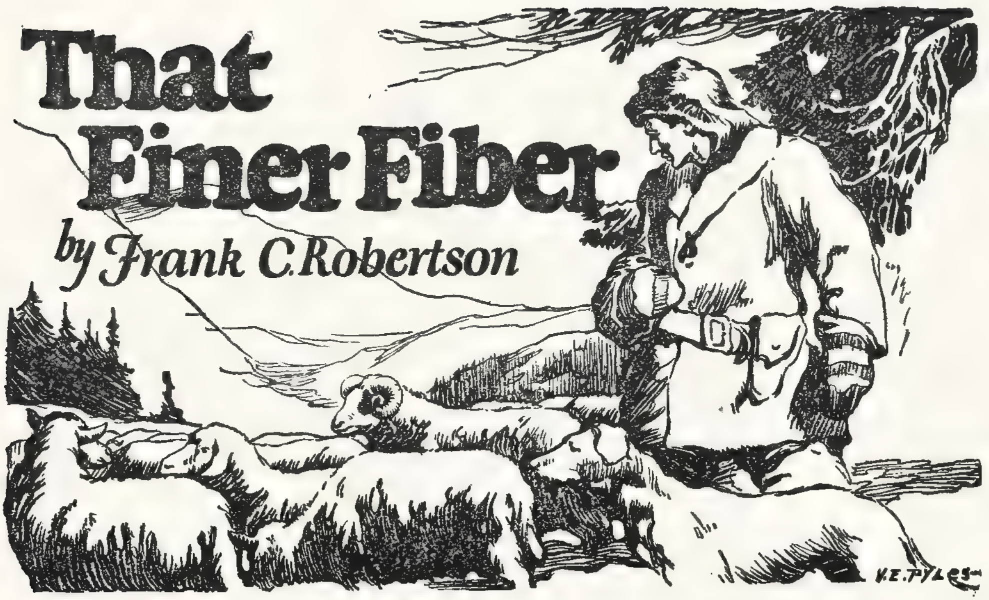
Fran's deep black eyes seemed to laugh at him as from out of the bottom of a pit.

"Oh, rats!" she concluded inelegantly, and left him to enjoy the problem alone.

TO BE CONTINUED

That Finer Fiber

by Frank C. Robertson



Author of "The Hole in the Rock."

FIGHTING a blizzard in three feet of soft snow, with the barometer dropping point by point until it sinks below zero, and the cold hurled into the marrow of your bones by a wind utterly defiant of the heaviest sheepskin-lined clothing, is no sinecure at best. But when you are handicapped by two or three thousand helpless sheep it becomes a battle to try the souls of men.

For five days Sol Fisher's outfit had been bucking snow in Hayes Cañon in a desperate attempt to break over the divide into Bannack Valley. If this could be accomplished there would still be time to get on to the Corral Creek range by the beginning of the lambing season about the twentieth of April. But if it could not be made it meant back-tracking through the snow, and a long detour through Pocatello Valley.

It had been a late Spring, and when the snow finally began to thaw there was a frantic rush of the sheepmen who had wintered on the Nevada Desert to get back to the lambing-grounds in Idaho. Sheep were piled up along the trail by the thousands until the scant feed along the trail was almost grubbed out by the roots.

It was this which had determined Sol Fisher to try to get his three herds through Hayes Cañon and cut off seventy-five miles of distance. The herds were half-way up the cañon when the blizzard came. Ray Coburn, who pulled the leading camp, constructed a drag out of small cedar-trees, and dragged it along in front of the herd with his camp-team.

Herman, the herder, and incidentally the best sheep driver on the range, kept the herd stringing along in the narrow track with the aid of his dogs. By the evening of the third day of the blizzard, herd and camp were on top of the divide, but there were no signs of either of the other herds.

Ray fed and blanketed his horses, rustled wood for the camp, melted snow and began to prepare supper. Herman sat on the projection and watched with lack-luster eyes. The faces of both men were beaten raw by the flying particles of snow, and their eyes were sore and blood-shot. But Ray, at least, was filled with the exultation of accomplishment. He would have liked to talk the matter over, but Herman was morose and sour. In the six months that Ray had moved his camp he had not spoken a hundred words.

They were just beginning to eat when Sol Fisher rode up. He was a tall, gaunt man, austere and silent—the usual type of western flock-master. He had to thaw

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the ice from his long bedraggled mustache before he could speak without difficulty.

"You boys sure done something no other men could do," he complimented them. "The other two herds have balked. We've got to go back an' try to lamb in Rattlesnake Basin, an' the sheep'll be thicker there than the sardines in a can."

"——, you don't intend to make us go back now, do you? It'll be plumb easy to git on down into Bannack Valley from here," Ray exclaimed.

"No I don't want you to go back," Fisher said wearily. "This herd is all I've got to keep me out of bankruptcy. It'll cost me a thousand dollars now to git corn hauled out from Kelton to keep the other herds from starvin' till I can git 'em out of the cañon, an' I can't expect to save more than fifty per cent of lambs in Rattlesnake. I want you to go to Paradise an' lamb out this here herd."

Both Ray and Herman sat waiting expectantly for their employer's next words. One or the other of them would be appointed boss. To Ray it meant a lot. Fisher quickly settled the matter.

"I'll depend on you to run the outfit, Ray; but of course you must keep Herman for he's the best herder on this man's range. I'll sign a bunch of checks for you to fill out as you need 'em, an' if you make good on this job there'll be a job of foreman for you, an' you can write out the checks yourself."

The sheepman scrawled his cramped signature on about twenty blank checks and passed them to Ray.

"Don't spend money any faster than you have to," he continued. "I'm liable to be hard-pressed for money before shearin' time."

"I'll do my best for you, Sol," Ray promised soberly.

He folded the blank checks and stuck them in one of the pockets of oilcloth stitched from bow to bow inside the camp.

"You'll have to night-herd all through Portneuf Cañon, for the farmers there are worse than coyotes," Fisher cautioned as he rose to depart. "They've got a cinch on the sheepmen, an' they don't hate to use it."

Fisher refused to stay all night. Characteristically, he had at once shed the burden of this herd from his mind, and he was anxious to get back to the herds which were still in danger.

"If I had herders back there like Herman I wouldn't worry so much; but I ain't, an' I'll have to git back. So-long boys, an' good luck."

A moment more and herder and camp-mover sat gazing into each other's eyes.

"What do you know about lambin' out a bunch of sheep?" Herman asked suddenly, an unmistakable sneer in his voice.

Ray straightened in his seat on the projection as if he had been touched by a live wire. The big, morose herder was plainly green with envy because he had not been chosen boss. A wave of anger shot through Ray that the man would wilfully multiply difficulties that were already well-nigh insurmountable. Had Herman been designated as boss Ray would have given his best efforts cheerfully. But his anger passed as quickly as it had come. He determined to get along with Herman at any cost.

"I've passed back and forth over this trail twice each year for four years, an' I never shirked a lambin' yet like lots of sheps do. Between us we ought to make out all right," he said quietly.

"One —— of a boss you are," Herman grunted disdainfully, as he began to strip off his sodden clothing preparatory for bed.

Ray sat before the stove, musing. He was only twenty-two, lithe and slender; but his muscles were hardened by constant out-door exercise, and his every movement was as swift and snappy as a steel spring. He was soft voiced, pleasant, and agreeable. But he had a purpose in herding sheep. Some day he expected to become a sheep-owner himself, and the route he had planned to that goal was to first become a foreman, then a partner. He knew that if he could lamb out this herd satisfactorily he would be well along on the road to attainment of his ambition.

Their progress until they entered Portneuf Cañon was comparatively smooth, although it seemed to Ray that Herman did not crowd the sheep along as much as he usually did. Neither did the herder vouchsafe another word. Both men were already worn out by hardship and exposure, but now it became necessary to night-herd every night for a week. The herd, never getting enough to eat, was not to be trusted for a moment.

Ray stood guard the first part of the night. At one o'clock he would wake

Herman up, and he always had a big pot of coffee made to help the herder keep awake. At daylight each morning the herd was traveling. Most of the way was through lanes, for the cañon was wide enough for ranches along the river-bottoms. Herman would cut off a small lead bunch of fifty or a hundred and drive them along with his dogs, and Ray would force up the stragglers, while his well-trained camp-team came slowly along behind with the camp wagon.

THE third morning in the cañon Ray was awakened by the usual ting-a-ling-ling of the alarm-clock. He sat up in bed and gazed around in a stupor of sleep. Suddenly his eyes fell upon Herman, and he came out of the daze with a jerk. The herder was sitting on the projection by the side of the stove—sound asleep. Ray leaped from the bed and shook the man's shoulders.

"Hey! Where's the herd?" he demanded hoarsely.

Herman opened his eyes stupidly, but there was a malignant glare in them when they rested upon the camp-mover. Ray sprang back on the bed and shoved open the little window in the back of the camp, and glanced out over the bed-ground. Not a sheep was in sight. He got back on the floor and hurriedly began to dress.

"I went to sleep—a man can't always stay awake," Herman growled defiantly.

Ray made no comment. His patience was sorely tried, but he fought to hold his temper. They set out together on the trail of the herd. It had gone back along the trail until it had come to a feed-ground where a farmer had thrown out several loads of hay to his cattle the evening before. The sheep had cleaned up every spear of the hay, and some of them had broken into the stack-yard and undermined the stack for several feet all around it.

The irate rancher met them at the stack. He was in a towering passion and threatened them with arrest for trespass. Finally he estimated his damage at one hundred dollars. Half of it would have been unreasonably high. Ray protested.

"Pay it, or I'll hold the sheep till you do—an' every day'll mean that much more damages," the rancher delivered his ultimatum.

Time was the all-important thing. There was not a day to be spared if they were to reach the lambing-ground before the herd started to lamb. Ray was forced to issue his first check, and it was noon before the reluctant sheep could be forced back to the camp.

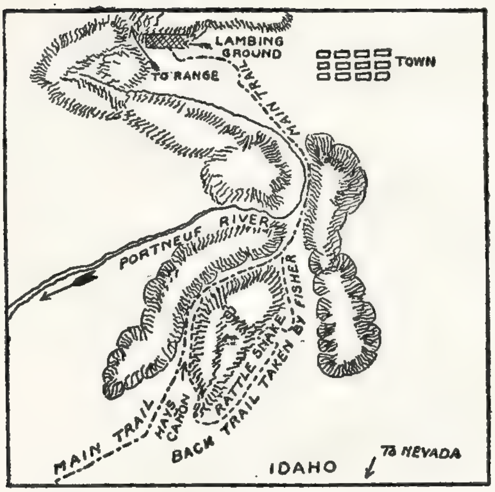
The next day Herman allowed the sheep to get high up among the cedars in a place where there was a fence on only one side. Ordinarily Ray would have thought nothing of it, for he knew that Herman was capable of getting every sheep rounded up before they entered the next lane. He had never heard the word "sabotage," but he knew that Herman was systematically practising something to cause delay or loss. When they entered the lane he requested Herman to help him count the markers—the blacks and bells. Herman sulkily refused. Without his help to string the herd Ray could not count the bobbing black sheep, let alone those white ones which wore bells.

Not until the next day did Ray find a chance to count the markers as the herd crossed a bridge. There were fifty-one blacks and eighteen bells. There should have been fifty-nine blacks and twenty-three bells. That meant that three or four hundred sheep had been lost in the cedars. They were in the last lane, and Ray dared not leave Herman alone there, so it was not until the next day that he found a chance to go back after them. One whole day was lost before he had the missing bunch back in the herd.

That night two lambs were born, a portentous warning; and the lambing-ground was yet five days' drive distant. Ray's usually good-natured face wore a look of mingled anger and dread as he knocked the two lambs on the head to save them from starvation or the coyotes.

They crossed the Bancroft Flat and climbed through the Ten Mile Pass on to Soda Flat without mishap, except that it took a day longer than Ray had estimated, and every night Ray was compelled to kill an increasing number of lambs to save their lives, as he reflected with bitter humor.

As soon as they reached the Bancroft Flat they began to meet sheepmen and camp movers going to town for supplies. Every man of them brought word that the lambing-ground available was jammed full of sheep. In that queer, vague way in which news spreads swiftly, even over the sheep-range, it became known that Ray was foreman



of this part of Fisher's outfit. Well-known sheepmen, whom Ray was especially anxious to impress, looked at him with quizzical expressions.

Finally they reached the divide between Soda Flat and Corral Creek—the promised land of the sheepmen. Ray looked out across the expanse of range with a discouraged eye. From his very feet the north and east slopes were still buried under dirty yellowish snow-drifts. The high, flat plateau known as Paradise was still a sickly, brown color without a particle of nourishment. Farther on, the mighty slopes of the Caribous were entirely covered with snow that was yet clean. By July these slopes would be an ideal Summer range, but there was no consolation in that fact for Ray. Only on the comparatively small strip of range covered by the foot-hills and small creek-bottoms along Corral Creek and the Blackfoot River was there feed enough to keep sheep alive. Ray counted thirty-four sheep-camps in sight. All he could do was to wedge in wherever he could.

Ray spotted the camp on top of a ridge, and unpacked. Then he hitched his team on to the buckboard he trailed behind the camp, and tying his saddle horse to the side, hunted up Herman.

"I'm goin' to Soda to git some supplies, an' to hire a couple of men to help us lamb. I'll come back tonight if I can hire somebody. I'll let them bring the commissary an' supplies tomorrow. Anything you want from town?" he asked the herder.

"Nothin'," Herman grunted.

In town Ray was able to hire two men, or rather one man, and a big, hulking, green boy. Leaving them instructions to bring the buckboard the next day he hurried back to camp. It was after dark when he arrived, and to his amazement there was not a sheep on the bed-ground. He entered the camp, and lighted a lamp, and a moment later he heard a heavy step on the double-trees and Herman opened the door and came in.

"Where's the herd?" Ray demanded sharply.

Herman favored him with a black scowl. "Mixed with Haskins' droppin' band," he announced with what seemed to Ray an air of triumph.

"Through an' through?" Ray gasped.

"Through an through," Herman grinned maliciously. "You'd ought to knowed it when you pulled my camp so close up agin' theirs."

"—— you, their camp was a mile away. You had to trail our sheep to git to mix with 'em. Do you know that that mix-up will cost Sol Fisher a thousand dollars with the herd all ready to lamb?" Ray demanded indignantly, his patience finally giving way.

A nasty grin overspread the face of the herder. He was a husky brute, at least forty pounds heavier than Ray. His festering resentment had at last come to a head, and he felt that in the crowded confines of the camp he had a chance to even up a lot of imaginary wrongs. He reached for Ray to drag him into a bone-breaking bear hug as a preparatory measure, but his arms clasped together upon vacant space. Ray dropped below the arms before they could tighten, and he came up straight again like a Jack-in-the-box. Blim! Blam! Right and left fist crashed squarely into Herman's face before the surprized herder could put up his guard.

Herman went over backward, and sat down on the projection with a grunt. Before he could start to raise himself Ray was pouring solid, straight-arm punches all over his face. The herder tried to reach for the Luger that swung at his hip, but again Ray was the faster. He flipped the gun out of the holster and flung it on the bed.

The herder could take it no longer. Each time he stopped a blow he let out a groan. He began to slide along the projection until he reached the door. Then he dived head-long through it, and his head crashed upon the wagon-tongue. He tipped over on the ground, but a moment later staggered to his feet. Ray confronted him.

"Want some more?" Ray demanded.

"I've got enough," Herman admitted sourly.

"All right. Now you listen to me, you measly coyote. I can't fire you, but I'll tell you this—if you'll quit I can pay you off, an' be —— glad to do it."

"I'll not quit," Herman stated doggedly.

"Well, then, the first time you try to crab things agin' the lickin' you got just now will seem like a sweet caress to the one you'll git then. An' I reckon I'll just borrow this gun of yours till the lambin' season is over, or till Sol gits up here."

Herman climbed back into the camp and threw himself on the bed. The bed, or bunk, lay crosswise of the camp in the back, and of course both men slept together. Ray had no intention of sleeping with Herman in his present humor. He knew very well that if the herder ever got his hands on him it would spell one long, sweet, good-night. He saddled his horse and rode over to Haskins' camp. The reception he received there was decidedly frosty.

"What the —— do you mean by mixin' with my droppers?" Haskins demanded angrily as soon as Ray entered the camp.

"I'm sorry, Haskins. I never had any intention of mixin' with you," Ray apologized.

"That don't help matters a —— bit," Haskins swore. "You're the boss, an' you're responsible. Your herder deliberately drove them sheep into our herd, an' the herder said you ordered him to do it if we didn't run. He said you told him you was goin' to chase us off our lambin'-ground. Look here, young feller, I don't run from no man. Furthermore, Sol Fisher has got to pay for every ewe an' lamb I lose because of it."

"Herman was mistaken. I never intended to try to crowd anybody," Ray denied.

"That don't help matters a bit. I've known Herman for years, an' I know he's got too much sense to pull a stunt like that unless somebody told him to. If you'd acted right I'd have divided up with you what little range I've got, but I sure won't now," Haskins stormed.

Ray accepted the inevitable. He sensed that further explanations would be useless, so he listened to Haskins' tirade in silence until the man tired of talking. Sheep-camp etiquette demanded that Ray be given supper, breakfast and a bed. He was given them, but here the social amenities ceased.

* * *

IN THE morning Herman arrived shortly after daylight. His face was bruised and swollen, but he vouchsafed no explanations to Haskins or his men how he had come by it. It was an easy matter, however, for them to connect that face with Ray's bruised knuckles. They wondered in silence, but their sympathy was plainly with the herder.

The mixed herds had to be driven a distance of five miles to a cutting out corral, and it took the remainder of the day to drive the immense herd, nearly six thousand in number, through the dodge gate. During the day more than a hundred lambs were born and were promptly trampled to death by the milling sheep. Ray was compelled to keep his herd in the corral all that night and part of the next day, until Haskins' herd was taken away.

His two new men had arrived, and that day the lambing began in earnest. Ray now found himself in possession of the very poorest range. On one side there was a mountain which was a festering den of coyotes and wolves, and on the other side there was not a thing to break the piercing, terrific blizzards which periodically came up from the northwest.

Because Ray was afraid to trust Herman alone with the dropping band he appointed the other man to assist him. He made the green boy camp-mover and cook, while he, himself, tended the bunches of ewes and lambs. Rightfully, Herman should have herded alone, and the extra man assisted Ray; but under the circumstances Ray felt that it was up to him to do two men's work.

The sheep were always ready to leave the bed-ground by four o'clock each morning. Before that the men had to be up and have their breakfast eaten. The first chore was to separate the ewes that had lambed that night from the rest of the herd. Usually this was from fifty to one hundred head. Then the wild, young mothers had to be made to claim their lambs, the skins had to be taken from dead lambs and fastened over orphans, or weak twins to get them a foster mother under false pretenses, and a hundred other disagreeable tasks.

Then there were the older bunches to attend to. The red calico flags which were deemed to have some potency in keeping away coyotes had to be changed as the bunches moved away from them. After dark each bunch had to be visited and lanterns lighted around them as a protection from predatory animals by night.

Thus it was that from 3:30 A.M. until 9:30 P.M. Ray had not a moment's leisure. He worked until his feet became leaden and his eyes glassy from fatigue. Yet he held on because of his innate loyalty to his "outfit." He felt that his own future in the sheep business was already shot to pieces as a result of Herman's enmity. But he fought on, stubbornly, silently, trying to save the life of every lamb that had a breath left in it.

Herman's licking seemed to have done him good. He treated Ray more respectfully, and did his work well. But his evil temper vented itself upon the luckless boy who moved camp. The boy never could move the camp to the right place, or in the right time to suit him. He could not cook a meal that the herder did not riddle with ridicule. Herman, in fact, became really talkative in his efforts to abuse the boy. As Ray was seldom at camp with Herman he missed most of this.

Only one factor seemed to aid Ray in his up-hill fight—the weather. But Ray knew his southern Idaho. He knew that any day a blizzard might whip up from the northwest. Until the first of June the weather would be full of treachery.

One day Herman complained of an aching tooth and asked to go to town to have it pulled. One herd had by this time been lambed out, and Ray wanted to get the other sheep-camp from Soda for the extra man to live in. He readily permitted Herman to take the team and go to town on condition that he bring back the new wagon and supplies.

The day after Herman came back it began to rain. Day in and day out it poured down, the only variation being supplied by an occasional flurry of snow. The newly born lambs humped their backs and remained in one position until they died unless artificial heat was provided, which, in most cases was an impossibility. Ray was not without bitterness that it was Herman who had put them in such a situation, but he had to admit that the man seemed to be over his grouch.

As the days dragged by Ray forgot what it was to be dry. His clothing was soaked despite his slicker and gum boots. He was obliged to sleep out with the weaker sheep, and the dampness permeated his tarpaulin and bedding. The bed grew musty and Ray developed a cold that bordered on the verge of pneumonia. Only the constant exercise in the fresh air and his iron nerve held him up.

THEN, one evening when he came in to supper, he found Sol Fisher. Sol acknowledged his salutation with the briefest of nods and waited in grim silence while Ray divested himself of his wet outer garments.

"Looks like you'd made a —— of a mess of things," Fisher remarked when Ray had finished his supper.

"We ain't done bad—considerin'," Ray defended himself briefly.

"No good sheepherder ever lets his herd leave the bed-ground at night. He never refuses to count his markers when there is a chance he's lost any. He never mixes a droppin' band with another herd on any provocation. You're guilty on every count," Fisher said bluntly.

"You said a herder—I wasn't the herder," Ray said.

"You was the boss. Herman says that the sheep left the bed-ground in Portneuf Cañon while you was night herdin'. He says he wanted to count the blacks, an' you wouldn't help him. He says you ordered him to mix with Haskin's outfit," Fisher enumerated.

"Anything else Herman says?" Ray asked, white-faced.

"Yes. He says you told him to git a complete outfit for the Summer camps when he was in Soda — an outfit that cost three hundred dollars, an' which we won't have a bit of use for until July, an' some of it never. I told you to cut down expenses to the last notch until after shearin', but here come one of them checks in that I signed for you for all that junk. That's why I left everything an' come on up here."

"I reckon you'd still believe Herman if I told you he was a liar on every particular," Ray ventured.

"Under the circumstances I sure would," Fisher retorted.

"Write out my time," Ray said tersely.

He saw that Herman had simply stolen one of the blank checks, and with it paid for all that worthless junk. To make it worse Ray had given the man a letter telling the merchant they dealt with in Soda Springs to let the bearer have anything he wished.

For the first time Ray noticed the absence of the herder. He realized that it had grown dark, and the herder was long overdue. At the same time he perceived that the weather had changed swiftly. The storm that had been hanging on so long was now culminating in the long overdue blizzard. The monotonous droning of the wind that had been carrying on all afternoon had suddenly changed to a roar of shrieking menace. The air was full of flying bits of ice that stung like bird-shot.

"Where's Herman?" Ray suddenly questioned the camp-mover.

The awkward boy shifted feet uneasily.

"I dunno," he said evasively.

"You moved the camp this afternoon—did you tell Herman where you were going to put it?"

"Naw, I wasn't goin' to stan' fer his guff. Let him find it," the boy grumbled.

Fisher leaped up and seized the boy by the throat.

"Do you mean that you've left a man out on the range on a day like this without tellin' him where the camp is?" he thundered.

The irate sheepman turned upon Ray.

"Hirin' a thing like this is about on a par with the rest of the things you've done runnin' this herd," he raged.

Ray quietly began to draw on his wet garments.

"Where you goin'?" Fisher demanded, his eyes beginning to pop out of his head in surprize.

"After the herder," Ray retorted. "You keep the light blazin', an' shoot the rifle about every five minutes after I've been gone an hour."

"——, man, you can't do any good!" Fisher exclaimed. "You'll be plumb lost before you can git a hundred yards, an' you'll both freeze to death."

"No we won't," Ray said grimly. "I'm goin' to bring that herder in—alive."

He slid the door open and vanished in the blizzard.

Every other herd on the range would find some sort of shelter, and Ray knew that Herman's herd would go before the storm until it reached some sort of wind-break, unless it should get up on the sheer, blank face of the mountain. If they did this every sheep would surely freeze to death. But Ray figured that Herman would go back to the sheep when he found the camp had been moved, and that he would stay with them until they reached some sort of shelter. When Ray had last seen the herd it was close to a deep coulée that ran parallel to the wind. He reckoned that Herman would force the sheep into it, and let them drift before the storm until they reached the head of it, then drop over the divide behind a hill. Ray's difficulty was to find this coulée.

Despite his efforts to bore into the wind he knew that he was losing ground. At times a sudden blast of the storm would pick him up bodily and hurl him for twenty feet, yet he fought on stubbornly. Finally he stumbled into a coulée and fell full length. A fit of coughing wracked his frame until he lay exhausted. Flat on the ground he was out of the wind, which seemed to shriek a foot above his head like a thousand baffled devils.

It would be lovely, he reflected, to lie there and go to sleep—out of the wind. Somehow, he forced himself to recognize that in his wet garments he would soon freeze to death. Yet it required several efforts for him to drag himself to his feet and into the maw of the wind. Now he sensed that it was not quite as bad in the coulée as it was out, and he heaved a sigh of relief, and drifted up with the wind.

Memory stirred within him that this was only a short, blind coulée, and not the one the herd would be in. He stopped and gathered his reserve of will-power, then launched himself over the edge of the coulée and staggered on at right angles with the wind which slithered through his sodden clothes, and into his very bones. Every sense except a dumb, blind instinct seemed to be driven out of him, but kept him in the struggle until he suddenly again pitched headlong into another coulée.

Again there was a bitter mental fight before he could drive himself to get up, but he finally made it. This time he was confident he was in the right coulée. He made no effort except to stay on his feet, as he allowed the wind to carry him swiftly toward the top of the divide. He had been borne out of his course more than he figured, and before he expected it he was out of the coulée and was being hurled over the top of the divide. His feet came down upon nothing and he dropped a distance of ten feet. The lack of wind in the place where he stopped made it seem for a moment like a vacuum. He had difficulty getting his breath. Again he coughed until he was exhausted.

It was pitch-dark long before this, and Ray could see nothing though he strained to make out objects around him. Suddenly something brushed against his leg, and bending down he touched with his hand the wet wool of a sheep. Others struck him, and he realized that he was in the midst of the herd which was crushing in to the bank he had fallen over to get out of the blizzard.

Ray lifted his voice in a shout. In a moment he heard a sort of gasping shout in reply. After some minutes Herman staggered up. The sleet had stuck and frozen to the man's wet garments until he was wrapped in a sheet of ice, and he had to paw at the ice upon his mouth and mustache before he could speak.

"Can't find the camp. Had awful time gittin' back to herd," he muttered.

"We'll keep under the cover of this ridge as far as we can, or u[illegible] we get to where we can hear Fisher shoot. It's our only chance," Ray observed.

Side by side they fought their way along, gradually veering into the teeth of the blizzard. Suddenly they heard the faint, far-away report of a rifle coming straight down wind. They stopped and turned their backs until a few minutes later they again heard the shot. Ray had had another coughing spell, and he was weak and giddy as they again turned and fought the blizzard face to face.

The wind seemed to drive their breath back in their lungs, and they were forced to fight against it with their heads under their arms. Ray felt himself weakening fast, and several times he lost his balance and was hurled back fifteen or twenty feet before he could claw his way back to position. Once he went down entirely, and the cough again attacked him for what seemed minutes. When it subsided he tried to get up—and failed. He looked for Herman, but the herder had disappeared.

With a final summoning of all his reserve strength Ray battled to his feet, and wavered back and forth in the wind. Every step ahead was answered by a gleeful shriek of the blizzard as it forced him back two. With a final pang Ray realized that he was done. He started to fall, just as a bulky, ice-clad figure loomed over him, and caught him around the waist.

"Come on, I'll help you," Herman said gruffly. "Had a —— of a time findin' you after I see you was gone."

Guided by the shots fired every few minutes by Fisher, Herman finally dragged Ray up to the double-trees of the wagon. Both men collapsed, but Fisher, wondering why the dogs were scratching on the wagon-tongue, opened the door and found them.

An hour later, warmed, fed, and divested of their soaked clothing, they sat upon the projections inside the camp and nodded with fatigue. Suddenly Ray heaved himself to his feet, and stood waveringly over the herder.

"Feel all right, Herman?" he asked urgently.

"Uh-huh," the herder grunted.

"Glad to hear it. Now you remember what I gave you once before in this camp? Well, that wasn't a patchin' to what I'm goin' to do to you now—unless you tell Sol the truth about what's happened since we left Hayes Cañon. Start talkin' or put up your dukes."

Herman was weary, unutterably weary. He glanced toward his own gun which hung at Ray's hip, where it had swung ever since their fight. His eyes roved furtively toward the door which was now locked against the storm, and from there to Fisher, who lay upon the bed watching curiously. There was no escape. It was fight or tell the truth. Herman had fought the blizzard—fought it to a finish—but there was not that divine spark in the soul of him which would enable him to fight on long after he was licked. He knew that Ray was made of that finer fiber which could.

His eyes acknowledged defeat, and words of truthfulness rolled from his lips.

Sangar

by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Wolf-Chaser," "The Net," etc.

CHILOGIR, the second, rather more than two hundred years ago, resembled very much his paternal ancestor, the hero, the sword-slayer. On a bluff overlooking a ford in the Yenesei under the snow summits of the Syansk, Chilogir sat his pony, his eyes alert and inquisitive, his leathern face puckered with interest. Yet Chilogir was not known by his skill with the sword; he was *sangar*, a worker of white magic.

He was a gray-haired gnome, an armored dwarf, whose steel-pointed helmet rose scarcely higher than the bare brush of the snow-covered steppe. He was watching the approach of an enemy.

A solitary Cossack was splashing across the ford looking about him like one who had lost his way, as indeed he had. The Cossack regiment that had been sent from Lake Balkash across the Mongolian marches some thousand miles, had been freely bled. It was by then heading back—what remained of it—with a plentitude of wounds to lick and few captured horses to drive before it.

Borasun had strayed to look for horses. His own mount was badly lamed by an arrow.

Limping across the ford, he scanned the bluff for hostile heads, and searched the snow for hoof marks. Except at the short ravine in front of him the bank rose sheer from the deep water of the Yenesei and Borasun did not see Chilogir until he had mounted the bluff.

"U-ha, Tatar!" he cried. "I want your horse. As for you, old dog face, I'll drop you in the river like a bird with a broken neck."

"*Alash!*" grunted the Tungusi, edging his pony forward for a rush. Borasun also moved forward to put ground between him and the brink of the bank.

Watchfully, they circled. As Borasun had lost his pistols and Chilogir had not his bow with him, both had drawn their swords.

The Tatar saw a slender Cossack with mild brown eyes, hardly more than a boy, but with a long arm and a straight back. Borasun was the most unruly of the *atamans* of the unfortunate regiment—his regiment that had been ordered to harry the Tatars. Half his childhood had been spent in the forests by the rushing Dneiper, or wandering half-naked in the Volga steppe.

He had learned early in life the use of a dozen weapons, and seen his masters-at-arms shot down or planted on stakes by Turk and Tatar. Danger was as the breath in his nostrils. Men said an elf of madness danced in his brain.

Once Borasun had dragged the carpets

"Sangar," copyright, 1922, by Harold Lamb

from a mosque near Stamboul, at the threshold of Bagche Serai itself, and had used the carpets for his horse to trample on. He had taken the silk and cloth-of-silver garments of a Polish knight and put them on, only to jump into a tar barrel to show how little he cared for such things.

It was said of him that he had drunk himself snorting with vodka, had leaped in, with boots and coat, to swim the Dneiper—a thing no sober man would care to do. His inn chimney was a steppe fire, and his chair a saddle.

And now Borasun had turned back across the Yenesei among the Tatars for a horse.

Chilogir rushed, slashing at head and stomach. His simitar gritted on Borasun's saber and he barely avoided the return sweep of the youth's blade.

"To one of us, death; the other, life," shouted the Cossack. "Come back, toad, I can't ride after you——"

The swords clashed, parted and clashed again. Borasun sent the Tatar's helmet spinning over the bluff into the water. Rendered wary by this, Chilogir circled.

Borasun laughed at him and urged his limping horse forward. This time the old man's simitar brushed his cheek.

"A good one, that!" Borasun pressed forward. "U-ha!"

The quick turns of the Tatar had brought him too near the edge of the bank. The earth gave away under the pony's hind hoofs. Clawing at the bank, warrior and horse disappeared.

Dismounting, the young *ataman* of the Cossacks went to the edge of the bluff some three spear-lengths above the water. He saw the Tatar pony swim against the swift current toward the ford, an arrow-shot away; but the Tatar gnome with Turkish mail under his sheepskin floundered and sank.

"Well, the horse is gone, no doubt of it," thought Borasun, "and his master will soon be spitting water in —— unless——"

On an impulse—he seldom acted otherwise—the youth leaped in the pool without bothering to rid himself of coat or boots. Feeling under water for the scalp-lock of his enemy, Borasun gripped Chilogir and swam for shore. No easy matter that. When at last they lay on the rocks Borasun was foredone and Chilogir as limp as a wet sack of meal.

Presently when the young warrior rose to seek his horse the old Tatar rolled over, vomited and stood up.

"*Hai,*" grunted Borasun in surprize, "you don't die easily, dog-face."

As they gazed at each other he burst out laughing, the old man looked so like a besotted grandfather. But the Tatar after steady scrutiny from his green eyes lifted both hands to his forehead and bent his head to Borasun's girdle.

"For saving my life, I will call you nephew and give to you two such horses as you have not seen before this."

Pointing beyond the bluff, he added:

"Come to my *yurt* in peace. You will eat and drink like a hero, for no man ever goes hungry from the house of Chilogir, the *sangar.*"

Borasun considered how much of treachery was behind this offer and judged there was little. Once in the Tatar's hut he knew the inviolate law of hospitality among the high caste Tatars would protect him. Moreover he lacked both food and a serviceable horse, the last a serious matter. He trusted to his wits to make his escape unmolested.

If he refused Chilogir's offer he departed on a crippled mount with an empty belly and the certainty of swift pursuit at his heels. Borasun could kill the old Tatar easily enough and leave without being followed. But having half-frozen himself to save the old chap's life he was in no mood to strike his enemy, now unarmed.

"So be it, uncle," he said. "Let the horses be good ones."

NOW Borasun, having left his saber outside the *yurt*, drank deeply of fermented mare's milk and sour wine. Seated at the guest's side of the fire in the hut, he gorged himself until he sweated with rich mutton, brought by the ancient woman who was Chilogir's wife—and then drank more. But even so he doubted the evidence of his eyes when the Tatar servants of the master of the *yurt* brought up the two horses for his inspection.

They were little bigger than ponies. They had horns growing in front of their ears, their hoofs were split like an ox's foot.

"I am bewitched," he cried. "These have come from the devil's stable to pay me a visit."

"They are reindeer, good sir," explained the Tatar, not adding that they were his two driving reindeer, not to be sold, or killed for food.

"*Ohai!*" The warrior emptied his bowl and rubbed his eyes. "Uncle, 'tis said magicians ride them. I will not."

"No need. They will draw you on a light sledge. See!" Chilogir pointed out the tent's doorway. "Snow falls. It will lie heavy in the mountain passes. My reindeer will take you where no horse can go—aye, and faster. They run with the wind and the wolves can not catch them. Thus will you go to your own land."

He bent closer to Borasun, his eyes glittering.

"Remember this. He who lays an evil hand upon my reindeer, who does them harm—he will suffer. He may not escape."

In the smoke from the fire the broad-lined face of the gnome who was Chilogir appeared black and his eyes blazed. They were like the eyes of a cat that sees in the dark.

Borasun crossed himself, then laughed.

"I will do them no harm, uncle. *Hai*, if they go fast, 'twill suit my taste. I ride with the whirlwind."

"Upon their ears is the mark of Chilogir, the *sangar*. If the Tatar folk see them in your keeping, Cossack, they will cut you open like a hare. So will I give you a mark by which it will be known that you are the friend of Chilogir."

From the tent wall behind him he drew a broad leather belt, ornamented with iron images of various beasts. At a sign from him the woman strapped it about Borasun, who regarded it with amusement.

"The little daughter of the house should do me this honor," he muttered. "Where is she hiding?"

"Chi-li is my daughter," said Chilogir. "She is riding over the snow on the steppe toward the setting sun. Aye, she was seized by the fellows of your Kazak regiment. They have taken her away."

Borasun felt for his sword, remembered that he had left it outside and shrugged. The Tungusi were wont to guard the virtue of their women closely. It was not well to meddle with the families of the Tungusi.

But Chilogir had given his word that no harm should come to Borasun, and the Cossack felt that his person was reasonably safe from retribution for the carrying-off of Chi-li.

All the same, the brooding quiet of the old man who was called a *sangar* made the youth rather uncomfortable. So he blustered.

"Was she pretty, this Chi-li?"

"Aye, she was a red flower of the steppe. She had not seen fourteen Summers."

"Well, then, she will not be killed."

The green eyes of Chilogir glittered.

"Where will they take her?"

"Over the passes of the Altai to the Kazak steppe, to Tabagatai, our town by the waters of Lake Balkash."

"And will you go there, my nephew?"

"Where else, uncle? Give me some more kumiss. I will take the road tonight, before cock-crow——"

"Chi-li would give the kumiss, if she were here. *Tchai*, there is nothing but smoke in the place where she sat! On the mare's skin, the white mare's skin by the fire. Ha, my women, give the stranger-hero to drink!"

Whether it was the kumiss—the fermented liquids of the Tatars were heady stuff—or his own drowsiness, Borasun did not know. Certainly he heard the old woman lamenting, wailing like a bereaved she wolf.

Deep though he drank, he felt sure that when Chilogir, the old *sangar*, the white conjurer, made the cry of a falcon a hawk answered, though it was night and snowing. When the Tatar uttered the call of a horse, his own beast whinnied; a wolf howled beside the tent.

"Remember," he heard Chilogir saying from very far, "no harm to my reindeer." The old man stretched his arms out to the west.

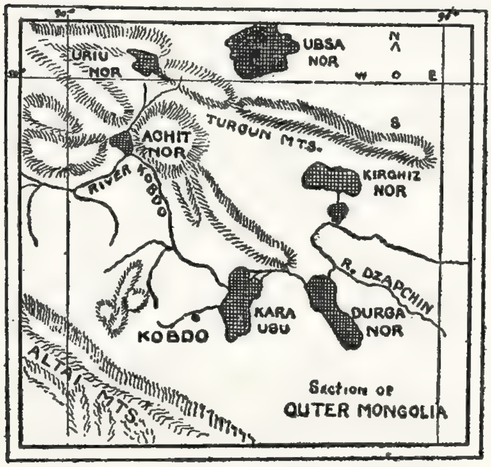
"Chi-li, little daughter, I send the reindeer."

When full consciousness returned to him Borasun was leaning back against the wooden support of the sledge, wedged in with furs over which were placed his saddle-bags with a fresh supply of frozen meat. The snow was still falling, making the daylight gray about him. His limbs were numb and his eyes ached.

Ahead of him moved the rump of a reindeer; he could see the antlers of the leader farther on. They were moving over the snow carpet with a long swinging gait that caused the isolated firs to flash past quickly.

Borasun could not see the trail they followed. But at the end of that day when the snow ceased, he could make out the white peaks of the Altai against the gray sky. By the contour of the land he knew he was approaching the pass through which he and his comrades had penetrated into Tatary.

THE market-place of Tabagatai was the meeting-place of many races. Wandering Cossack bands rode thither from the Ukraine; the Kirghiz shepherd drove in his flocks to be sold. Solemn lines of camels stalked through the mob, grunting under their burden of trade from the people of the Moguls to the people of the Tsar.



Thin-faced Moslems squatted in their stalls beside weapons and silver-work for sale, wrinkling their noses at the smells from the fish stall and the cloth booths of bearded and odorous merchants of Moscovy.

Over the snow, trodden into mud here, the smell of camel and horse-flesh vied with sweating humanity. The inns were places of Rabelaisian orgies.

Before the hearth of one hostelry Borasun matched dice with a bearded Cossack colonel, whose skin was marred by wounds and who was blind in one eye. A bottle of *gorailka* stood on the table between them and Borasun had looked long on the bottle. Luck was running against him and the hot blood was rising in his head.

"The devil's in the dice," the young warrior grumbled. "*Hai*, when I crossed the mountain passes from Tartary I heard werewolves howling in the glens and little children vampires flaming in the darkness. Now my luck is bad."

The Cossack, Balabash, crossed himself and murmured a prayer.

"It is true that unburied children make the worst vampires," he admitted sagely. "They cry and cry and climb up behind you. Then when you aren't looking, *psst*—they are sucking the blood out of your neck! How did you escape?"

Borasun jerked his thumb at the inn yard where a curious crowd was staring at the two reindeer. He had driven his unaccustomed beasts hard, but, being dependent on them for his life, had taken as good care of the animals as was within his power.

They had brought him safely over the Sair Pass where the howling of the Winter wind was indeed much like the cry of wolves and where the phosphorescent wood rotting under the snow resembled a green fire in the shadows.

So, going where a horse could not go, he had outdistanced his fellows, without meeting with them. In fact few of that Cossack *kuren* rode back alive from the killing Winter journey over the mountain passes. Those few had promptly sold what booty they had to the shrewd merchants of Tabagatai, in order to join in the general revelry, and drink to the memory of their departed comrades.

Rather proud of his driving reindeer—no such animals had appeared in the town before—Borasun drove them about the place in great style, enlarging on their virtues.

"See, good sirs," he would bellow at the watchers, "here are horses who go before the wind and run away from werewolves. They eat only moss under the snow and bark and such trash. Oh, they are quite a pair, I tell you. I wouldn't sell them; no, I wouldn't think of it."

Now Borasun felt with an unsteady hand in his wallet.

"May I taste a scorpion, Balabash, if you haven't the last of my gold. Well, here's my hat and coat. I'll stake them and win."

But the goddess was perverse. Borasun's gold-inlaid scabbard went the way of his other garments. His sword he would not wager.

"Two hundred thalers," said a voice at his ear, "for your reindeer."

It was Cherkasi, one of the richest of the merchants, a dealer in slaves. He was from Kief, and it was said no man could outdo him in a bargain. Moreover, having a great store of goods, he was one of the masters of Tabagatai. He was a very tall man, in a soiled mink coat, with a broad face marked with the smallpox.

"Go back to your scavenging Cherkasi," grunted Borasun; "this is a place for warriors."

The eyes of the merchant puckered. It was said that he got his start as a camp-follower who robbed the dead after a battle.

Instead of answering angrily he smiled.

"Two hundred gold thalers," he repeated, "and when you win from the colonel you can buy back your beasts. Here is the gold."

Flushed and unsteady, Borasun stared at the coins. Then he swept them up and cried to Balabash.

"What say you, good sir, at one throw? Your gold against this?"

The Cossack wiped his mustache and nodded.

"So be it."

Borasun lost. He caught up the *gorailka* flask, emptied it, cast it into the fire and straightway went to sleep on the hearth.

> "When the war is over, poor chap, when the
> war is over,
> You will find, poor fellow,
> Your wife gone away from home,
> And your hide full of wounds."

Thus sang Colonel Balabash, spreading his feet to the fire and sighing deeply, for he was a melancholy man.

Awake and sober once more, Borasun left the inn and borrowed two hundred thalers from various comrades. Then he swaggered off to the *serai* outside the town wall where Cherkasi kept his pack-animals, his retainers and slaves.

Now reindeer are unusual beasts—peculiar, that is, to those who do not understand them. The merchant did not know how to handle the halter-cord that controlled their movements and being unfriendly to animals he did not make any progress with the two deer, who at once became very stupid and obdurate. They would not go where he wanted, nor would they stay when he left them.

Finally, assisted by Kirghiz caravaneers and his henchmen, Cherkasi beat, tugged, and lashed them into the *serai*, where they stood trembling. He wore heavy boots, and the limbs of a reindeer are frail.

Borasun walked through the entrance in the rock wall and growled under his breath when he saw the evidence of mistreatment on the hides of his two pets.

"Here are your two hundred thalers," said the warrior. "I will take back my reindeer."

The merchant sidled forward as Borasun reached for the driving cord.

"Nay, what would you do, Cossack? The reindeer are mine. They are rare beasts, and I will take them to Kief to sell at a good profit."

"*Hai*, but look here. You said if I had two hundred gold pieces I could buy back the reindeer. Here is your money."

Cherkasi smiled.

"Nay, Sir Cossack. I said if you won from Balabash you could have them back. You did not win. They are mine. Does an *ataman* break his word?"

Scowling, Borasun fingered the wallet.

"Listen to me, you greasy-fingered flesh-seller," he said at last. "These animals saved me my life back yonder in the wilderness. I'll not have them thrashed by a fellow like you. How much do you want for them?"

"From you, nothing. If they are worth so much to you, they are to me. I have some Osmanli lords of Chatagai coming to look at the women your fellow soldiers have transferred to me in trade. They have never seen such deer. They will pay a good price. I will not sell them to you——"

"You rat!"

Borasun's saber was out in a flash. Cherkasi had been waiting for that. He shrank back, calling over his shoulder. Desire for revenge for the hard name Borasun had given him in public, outweighed even the chance for gain, at present, in his mind. A half-dozen armored soldiers, retainers of the merchant, ran forward at his signal.

"U-ha!" shouted the Cossack. He warded a blow from one of the servants, and cut the man down. A pistol cracked from the group, but Borasun advanced on them, his lean face dark with rage.

"A Cossack fights!" There came a shout from behind him. "Cut, slash!"

And the old Colonel Balabash jumped across the *serai* wall, swinging his saber. Cherkasi raised a cry for help and men were heard running toward the place.

"What is it?" demanded Balabash, ranging himself beside Borasun.

When he heard—for the retainers had drawn back a pace, reluctant to match blows with the two warriors—he became thoughtful.

"This is a knot you can't pick with your sword, *ataman*," he whispered. "Cherkasi is a dog, but he bought the reindeer. If you kill him or his men, he will appeal to the governor of the town. You struck the first blow——"

"One of his men struck first, on my oath!"

"No matter. The governor and the merchants do not love us Cossacks, after they have bought our spoil. They'll hang you off the walls for the kites to dine on. Sheathe your sword and come away."

He was forced to pull the slender Cossack off toward the gate. Borasun called back:

"Harm those beasts and a curse is on you, merchant. That was the word of a magician, Chilogir——"

He shook off the elder's hand and strode past the tents of Cherkasi. The flap of one fell open, and a pretty brown face peered out at the two warriors.

"Chilogir!" Borasun heard a whisper. "*Ai-a*, you wear the belt of Chilogir, my lord. Tell me, what of him? I am Chi-li."

Borasun paused and scratched his head, without heeding the snarls of the merchant at his back. He could not remember where he had heard the name Chi-li. Once, when he had been drinking, it was. She was said to be pretty, he reflected. Well, so she was.

He surveyed the wasted brown cheeks, and the quick eyes under which were deep circles. He could not remember who Chi-li was.

"Whose woman are you, little sparrow?" Balabash asked, twirling his mustache.

"Mine," cried the shrill voice of Cherkasi. "Mine, bought from one of your own comrades, Borasun, for three hundred and twenty thalers. Get along with you! She is my slave and I will sell her to the Turkish lords who pay well for women of other races——"

Perceiving the mute appeal in the eyes of the girl, Borasun could but shake his head. Something that he had meant to do for Chi-li—well, he must have dreamed it.

Seeing that she was staring at his broad leather girdle ornamented with iron images, Borasun unbuckled it and handed the belt to her.

"Keep this thing, then, Chi-li," he grunted.

"So, Cherkasi," murmured Balabash, "you would sell this handsome little mouthful to a Turk, eh? Have you any bowels?"

The merchant refastened the flap of the tent hastily, muttering under his breath. Balabash watched him angrily, and observed —

"How much will you take for her?"

Cherkasi spat and was heard to say to himself that he would have no dealing with such dogs of the steppe.

"Dogs!"

Balabash had his saber half way out, when Borasun, grinning, caught his arm.

"Have you forgotten the governor and his kites so soon, good sir?"

"True!" The colonel shrugged and linked his arm in that of his comrade. "Cherkasi, you call yourself a Christian, may the devil eat me if you don't. Some day the devil will call you a liar."

So they went off to the inn, being hungry. Already Chi-li, if not the reindeer, had passed from their minds although their hands itched to get at Cherkasi. Behind them a trembling girl stared from the belt to the slit in the felt tent through which she could see the picketed reindeer.

IT WAS toward the end of the second watch of the night and even the bazaar dogs were quiet when Pan Pishnivitz knocked at the inn door. Being a mild man, a Pole, with a secret sense of his own importance as lieutenant of the *voevod*—the governor of Tabagatai, the knock was discreet yet firm. Amid the babble of voices from within it was not heard. Pan Pishnivitz knocked again, more loudly, and felt of the priming of his pistols.

True, he reflected, he had a dozen men at his back, halberdiers and musket men from the governor's castle. And the handful of Cossacks in the tavern were little better than vagabonds—since the country was not at war just then. If Holy Church and the *voevod* and the Empire had been at war and in need of Cossack sabers matters would be different.

So the lieutenant entered with a steady tread and fixed his eye on the hawk-like face of Borasun.

"Cossack," he proclaimed, not without

importance, "his excellency the lord governor of the town and province of Balkash has placed you under arrest to answer for a manifest crime and be punished accordingly." He nodded solemnly, adding: "Be a good fellow, Borasun, and don't stir up a rumpus. If you are to be hanged, you no doubt deserve it; it's your Christian duty to obey the law."

Borasun's black eyes twinkled while he tried to think which of his numerous misdeeds had come to the notice of the governor.

"Is it on account of that dog of Cherkasi's I struck down just before sunset?"

"Not at all, Borasun," replied the lieutenant soothingly. "The dog was a Kirghiz and he made a pass at you first, I am told. Nay, this is a crime."

Borasun sighed. Luck was a mischievous jade. Already that day Cherkasi had thrown dirt on his beard—or at least on the beard of old Balabash—and he was helpless to take revenge. Moreover Cherkasi was exhibiting his cherished reindeer. Now Borasun was accused of a crime.

He rose.

"What is the charge, Sir Fish—Pish, or whatever your name is?"

"Thieving."

At this the *ataman's* face flushed dark and the other Cossacks looked up. A group of Muscovite merchants motioned for the innkeeper, to settle their score. Because if there is one thing more than another that a Cossack does not like it is to be called a thief. Blaspheming is the worst crime on his calendar, but stealing is a good second.

A Cossack takes spoil at will; he may fight—preferably with his mates—until the sun is red; he may drink himself staggering, but he will not steal.

So the revelers at the inn stared at the full wallet in Borasun's hand, the gold with which—contrary to Cossack custom—he would not gamble. His mates from the Ukraine knew that it was borrowed, but others did not.

"It is the governor's order," repeated the lieutenant uneasily. "Testimony has been given——"

"What was stolen?"

"The two reindeer bought by Cherkasi, the merchant, and a woman named Chi-li. You and the merchant were at blows about the reindeer, and you were seen by a score of townspeople to talk with the girl and pass something to her, into the tent. Just after nightfall the three vanished as if by witchcraft. You are known to have a quarrel with Cherkasi. Where have you taken his goods?"

"Cherkasi! Does he charge that I am a *thief?*"

The veins stood out on Borasun's forehead and the whites of his eyes turned red.

From the center of the group of men-at-arms Cherkasi, the merchant, lifted his voice defiantly.

"Six hundred—a thousand thalers, I must have out of this Cossack. He swore that I would receive an injury because I kept the reindeer; the girl wore his belt—she has an understanding with him. After nightfall my guard at the *serai* entrance was bowled over by horned beasts and lashed with a whip. Food, furs were taken from the tent of my slaves—most costly furs, gentlemen, I swear. Who ever heard of a slave girl——"

"Oh, we've heard all that before," muttered the lieutenant, who had no liking for the merchant. "And the sledge with the girl went away from all the roads, out on the steppe to the east——"

"This Cossack plotted it, to do me harm. A thousand thalers will not pay for the harm."

Colonel Balabash rose from his stool by the hearth; his limbs were not as warm as in his youth, and he liked a fire of nights. "Lieutenant Pishnivitz," he said, "the *ataman* Borasun has been by my side since we left the slave sty of Cherkasi. He has had no hand in the escape of the slave. We have been sitting here at the inn since before dusk. Now, sirs," he waved his hand at the Muscovites, "is not this the truth?"

He folded his arms, and his black beard bristled. All those in the room hastened to say that it was the truth. Pishnivitz scratched his head. He had no wish to cross the path of the old colonel, but there was Cherkasi's charge to be disposed of somehow.

Seeing his hesitation, Balabash thrust himself through the soldiers until he faced the merchant, who shrank back as far as he was able. Extending the hilt of his saber under the wrinkled nose of Cherkasi, the colonel roared:

"Smell of that, you jackal-sired spawn of the dung heap. And say whether Balabash lies!"

Cherkasi clawed at his beard and was silent. Satisfied, Balabash returned to his seat by the fire, calling for hot mead to be brought for the soldiers.

After drinking his mead, the lieutenant wiped his mustache and came to a conclusion.

"Good health to you, colonel. I hope the worthy Cossacks are not angry. I had my duty—— Now this is what happened. The escape of the woman was the work of magic, of course——"

"And Chersaki would have sold her to a Turk," muttered Balabash.

"White magic, assuredly," nodded Pishnivitz.

"That's it!" roared Borasun, who had been thinking. "I remember now. Chi-li is the child of Chilogir, the Tatar magician. He is calling his reindeer and his daughter to him, a thousand miles away. Cherkasi, the merchant, picketed the reindeer under the nose of the girl who has been their mistress for ten years——"

The Cossacks laughed and piled from the inn to watch Cherkasi, almost beside himself with rage, calling on his servants and armed men to get horses and take up the pursuit of the reindeer somewhere out in the dark steppe.

"They will never overtake reindeer," growled Balabash, whose good humor was restored at sight of Cherkasi's vain search for six hundred thalers.

"I remember, too," assented Borasun, "that Chilogir said misfortune would come upon one who mistreated his reindeer."

"It is true," nodded Pishnivitz sagely. "That was good mead."

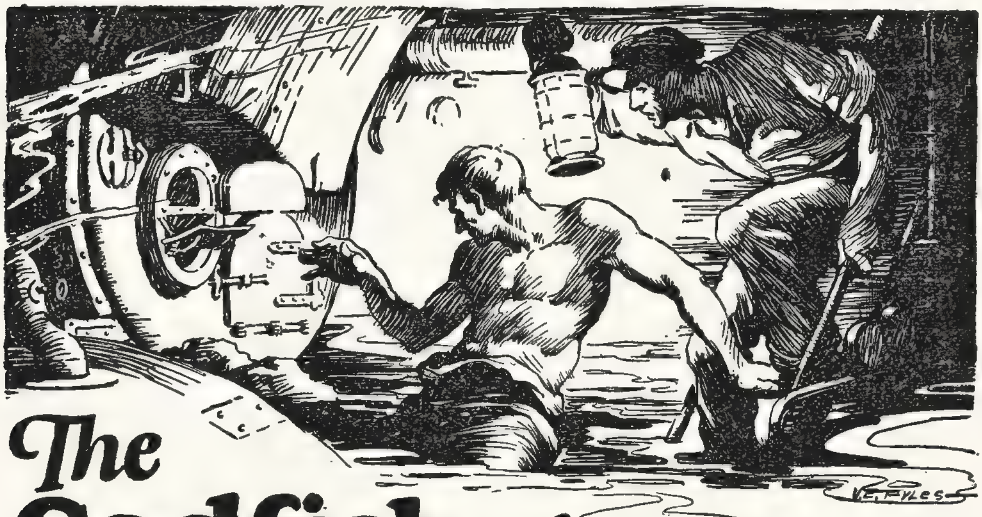
"Undoubtedly true," assented Balabash. "Let us have some more of it."

So they departed, singing—

"When the war begins, brave chap, when the war begins,
You will find, brave fellow,
That princes give you gold,
And the priest says, 'Benedicite.' "

Beyond the Altai, Chilogir, the Tungusi *sangar* waited in his tent, until the reindeer he had marked with his mark and sent with the warrior bearing his belt to the place where he knew his daughter would be—waited patiently until his reindeer should return. He knew that they would do so.

Because it is a peculiarity of reindeer that they will not stay with the master who beats them.



The Codfish

by W. Townend

Author of "The Revenge of Malachi Doddrick," "Paddy Burnbrook's Wig," etc.

WHENEVER the S. S. *Hyacinth* is lying in the West India Docks or Millwall, home once more from Pacific Coast ports, I go on board to see Mr. Harrington, the chief engineer, and listen to his stories of the sea.

One afternoon he gave me his views on a novel that he had just read.

"Did you like it?" I asked.

"Like it!" he said. "It's bilge!"

He tossed the book into his bunk and frowned and plucked at his chin, a sure sign that he was, if not angry, annoyed.

"The mate lent it me," he said. "He told me I'd like it. I don't. Part of it's about a farm, part about the sea! The feller who wrote it doesn't know what he's talkin' about!"

"He's a very big writer," I said, meekly.

"So it says on the wrapper," said Mr. Harrington. "But that's nothin'. You'd think a man with his reputation would find out something about what he's supposed to be writin' on, wouldn't you?"

"It's silly to write about the sea if you don't get the correct details from some one who knows," I observed, and I felt that what I had said was common sense.

Mr. Harrington, however, shook his head.

"I never said that the sea part of the book was wrong," said Mr. Harrington. "It is, of course. But I should have thought any man, not out of his mind, would have known what you feed cows on in Winter! How's he think they're goin' to give milk, eh?"

I knew better than to touch on a topic so vast!

"Is there anything else wrong with the book?" I asked.

"I didn't care for any of it," said Mr. Harrington. "I tell you, you'd think from that last chapter that married life was run like a feed water-pump or a relief valve! It's not. Machinery runs accordin' to certain laws, married life don't!"

Mr. Harrington stopped talking and stared through puckered eye-lids out of the port into the twilight. And he saw, I was positive, not the gaunt outline of the hydraulic crane on the quayside and the transit shed and the dock warehouses and the arc lamps, but something that I should never see; the small, empty house near Cardiff, perhaps; or the girl with the copper-brown hair and blue eyes who had left him without a word; or maybe the black-edged letter that had come to the ship at Constant.

Presently he sighed and continued.

"Listen to me a moment! How are you goin' to judge other people's marriages, eh? A man falls in love with a girl. To him she's perfect. To his friends she's impossible. Which is c'rect, eh? I sailed with a chief once who had the best little wife in the world, so he said, but she —— near ruined him. Afterward I understood, but at the time I thought he was crazy. He was, too. But then we most of us are. I am, I know. Lord deliver us! I saved his ship for him, an' nothin' to show for it, neither, not even a medal! But that's the way things go——"

Here I interrupted.

"Wait!" I said. "Harrington, you saved a ship! Now, carry on from there, for heaven's sake! And don't skip!"

Mr. Harrington, who has the most wonderful memory of any man I ever met, looked at me seriously. Then his gray eyes twinkled and his thin lips twisted into the dry, lop-sided grin I knew so well.

"It slipped out without my knowin'," he said. "I saved a ship all by myself, with no one to help me but a mate holdin' a hurricane-lamp!"

"Great!" I said. "Where did it happen?"

"Lord!" said Mr. Harrington. "Now, you've started! I'll tell you the yarn because I know if I don't what a —— nuisance you'll make of yourself! But if you're lookin' for wild an' thrillin' adventures an' heroism an' shipwrecks an' bucko mates an' stuff like that, you're goin' to be disappointed! It's just a yarn about a chief engineer and his wife! You listen an' if you want to hear, don't interrupt!"

"Go ahead!" I said.

AFTER I came back to old Parbuckle's (said Mr. Harrington), I went as second on the *Hydrangea.* The chief engineer was a Liverpool-Scotsman—Andrew MacArkill—a nice little man who ought to have been liked an' wasn't. I learnt the reason for that before I'd been on the ship twenty-four hours. The third engineer, Stanley Hosdyke—the "Codfish," they called him because of his large, round eyes—told me down in the engine-room.

Soon as I seen Hosdyke I put him down as a man with a grievance. I was right. I was helpin' him overhaul the valves of the bilge-pump, I remember, when all of a sudden he whispered—

"Mr. Harrington, what do you think of the chief engineer's wife?"

His eyes were almost bulgin' out of his head he was so much in earnest.

"I've not met her," I says; "an' not likely to, neither!"

He gave a laugh, then, like a dog with a sore throat barkin'.

"Huh! You'll meet her all right," he says. "She's not passed you!"

"I didn't savvy, an' said so.

"She's the chief engineer on this packet," says Hosdyke, "not Andrew!"

He turned an'—I can see him now—spat into the bilges.

"It gives me a bad taste in my mouth to speak of her!"

I didn't ask any questions. I didn't have to.

"Mr. Harrington," he says, "you're new to the ship!" He looked more like a codfish than ever. "You're new to the ship!" he says. "Go slow how you run foul of the chief's wife. I'm givin' you some advice for your own good!"

"Friend," I says, "when I want your advice I'll ask for it! Get me?"

He nodded.

"I'd like you to hear my side of the case," he says; "that's only fair, as you're bound to hear hers! Because I'm not a plaster-saint like the chief, she's got it into her head I'm bad! She's goin' around list'nin' an' spyin' an' addin' up two an' two till they make five, believin' whatever she wants to believe, an' she won't be happy unless she runs me out of the Company! She's got no mercy!"

That afternoon the chief hauled me out of the engine-room to be introduced to his wife.

"Mr. Harrington," he says, "this is Mrs. MacArkill. I hope you'll be friends!"

"I hope so, too," I says.

If Mrs. MacArkill hoped so as well, she kept her hopes to herself. She was a small woman, smaller than Andrew, but thin; Andrew was fat. She was pale in the face, an' her smile didn't seem real, an' her features were sharp, an' her eyes faded. That kind of woman.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Harrington," she says, "often!"

An', quick as a flash, I knew we were enemies.

"My brother," she says, "was Charley Williams, chief engineer of the *Mysore!*"

"Indeed," says I, an' I left it at that. Her brother an' I had had trouble enough for any two men, though we'd parted friends.

Mrs. MacArkill never bothered to hide what she thought. She despised the lot of us. Me, most of all! She was scared, I believe, that my comin' back to the firm would affect Andrew's promotion or his chance of a better an' bigger ship! An' Andrew! Whatever his wife said or did was right. She couldn't do wrong. He says to me one day on deck.

"Harrington, what do you make of the third? Not as steady as he might be, eh?" He looked at me, with his head on one side, like a plump little bird.

"He's good enough, chief," I says.

"Well," says Andrew, "I don't think so! An' my wife don't think so, either. It's come to her ears, one way an' another, that he's not as clean livin' a young man as we've got a right to expect! The woman who kept the place where he had a room told her everything."

So that was it, was it! Poor Andrew!

"A woman of great intelligence, my wife," he says. "I believe, Harrington, she knows as much what goes on in the engine-room as I do myself!"

I believed it, too, but I didn't say so. But what do you make of a man, so blind, an' so fat-headed an' tactless, that he'll ram his wife an' his wife's opinion down the throats of the men he sails with, like he did?

An' then the old man, whom Andrew looked down on much the same way as his wife looked down on us, came to the door of his room an' called him an' when I turned my head I saw Mrs. MacArkill herself on the quay. She came aboard.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Harrington," she says. "You an' my husband were havin' a very interestin' conversation just now, weren't you!" One way of askin' a question, of course!

"We were talkin' about the ship!" I says.

She gave me one of her quick little looks, as much as to say she didn't think I was speakin' the truth.

"Was my husband tellin' you what he thought of the third engineer?" she says. I knew then she'd told Andrew to ask me about Hosdyke! I smiled, but I didn't answer. That made her angry.

"If you're smilin' at my husband, Mr. Harrington," she says, "I won't have it. There isn't a more capable engineer in the port of Liverpool!"

A queer little woman! Her face was pink, an' her eyes snappin'.

"Your husband," I says, "may be the most capable engineer in the whole world, but," says I, "what's that to do with the third?"

"That means," she says, "that you're wonderin' why he's only chief engineer of the *Hydrangea!* It's because he won't use any influence in pushin' himself. People don't know how fine Andrew is, or how clever, an' if it depends on him talkin' about himself, they never will."

I did wrong, then. I laughed. But I couldn't help it. She blazed up at me.

"Mr. Harrington," she says, "don't put on airs with me! I know what you are. My brother told me!"

"I daresay he did," I says, "but next time you see him, if you want him to talk, ask if he remembers the *Mysore* runnin' into heavy weather off Finisterre on Christmas Day! He'll know what I mean," I says. "You ask him!"

I was as mad as she was! I might have been one of the trimmers out of the stokehold an' she chief engineer! She'd heard stories about me, of course! She would. An' she'd talk! Let her! I didn't care. That's what I told her, anyway. But I did care, an' she knew that I cared. An' that, you might say, was the start of the trouble—nothin' more!

Andrew an' his wife had been married years, an' yet the way they went on when we sailed you'd have thought they were bride an' bridegroom. She burst into tears when she said goodby. An' Andrew, he didn't smile for a week. You'd have imagined his heart was broken, an' he'd never see her again! It gave you the hump to watch him.

I SPENT two years about with Andrew MacArkill, makin' trips between Liverpool an' the U. S. A., West Indian ports, an' back home again. The *Hydrangea* wasn't a bad old tub; slow, of course, but in a heavy sea just about perfect. An' the engines, even though they were old, weren't like the scrap I'd been used to. Take 'em all round, we hadn't too bad a crowd on board—deck-officers included.

Joe Sternway, the mate, was as good a friend as I've ever had, an' the old man, himself, in spite of Andrew, wasn't the old chump I'd been led to expect. Andrew I liked. If it hadn't been for that wife of his, an' the way he was everlastin'ly singin' her praises an' readin' bits of her letters aloud if you'd give him a chance, I'd have said he was harmless.

About the only man on the ship that I never took to exactly was the Codfish—Stanley Hosdyke, the third. What's it they say? Poets are born? Engineers are, too—to a certain extent, at least—but they're made as well, an' not in the shops on shore, but at sea, an' in heavy weather, with the ship rollin' like thunder, an' the bilge-pumps chokin', an' the propeller racin', an' the firemen lettin' the steam fall to blazes, an' the bridge cursin' you down the tube, an' — Oh, crumbs! That's how you learn, of course. But you've got to have something to learn on. Hosdyke hadn't. He wasn't an engineer at all; an' he never would be; an' he hated the sea.

He told me a good deal about himself, one way an' another; he was brought up by an uncle who put him to engineerin' because he couldn't be bothered to think of anything else. After he'd served his time in the shops he got him a job at sea, an' told him to clear out an' not worry him any more. See? But it was the wrong job!

What do you think the Codfish wanted to be? You'd never guess, if you tried! A farmer! A fact. An' from the amount he talked, if you gave him his head, you've have thought he'd been used to cattle an' sheep an' horses his whole life! But not if you knew anything about 'em yourself, you wouldn't! Between you an' me, he was just about as ignorant of farmin' as anyone could be—considerin' he was Liverpool born an' bred, I wasn't surprized.

The poor Codfish said what I'd said many a time. The next world had no terrors for him after the engine room on board the *Hydrangea*. I wonder what he'd have done on the *Mysore* or the *Arabella* or the *Umballa!* Compared with them packets the *Hydrangea* was a reg'lar *Mauretania!* I told him, but he didn't believe me. Nothin', he said, could be worse than the *Hydrangea!* So he drank an' went off on the loose by himself an' brooded over his wrongs. An' at the end of each voyage when we reached Liverpool an' he saw the chief's wife comin' aboard, he'd call her all the names he could lay his tongue to; goin' beyond the limits of good taste, as the mate put it, even when talkin' behind a person's back.

The Codfish said, too, that she was watchin' him, an' she'd be his ruin, if he gave her a chance. I got tired of hearin' him.

"Stanley," I says, "why don't you try for another ship?"

"What's the good?" says he.

I knew —— well the reason he stayed on the *Hydrangea*, of course! Whatever the chief's wife might be—an' I was ready to agree with Stanley in what he thought of her—he'd never get hold of another chief as easy to work with as Andrew.

An' so things rubbed along for a year an' a half, an' then one mornin', soon after we reached Liverpool at the end of a voyage, the Codfish told me he'd got some news for me.

"Harrington," he says, "I'm goin' to marry the finest an' sweetest girl in the world!"

——! They all are, aren't they? Here was Stanley Hosdyke sayin' the same as Andrew exactly! The finest an' sweetest girl in the world! Well, well! I said I was glad. An' I was. It 'ud make a diff'rence. Her name was Kitty, he said. She was perfect. An' he was a mis'rable waster, but he'd never touch a drop to drink as long as he lived, or look at another girl, an' his eyes were more like a fish's than ever, he was so pleased. He'd have gone on talkin' till dinner time if I'd let him.

"Tell me the rest later," I says. "When your mind's clear. What you want to do now," says I, "is to confine your attention to the cross-heads an' crank-pin bearin's. Everything else will keep!"

He laughed like a kid who's been given sixpence.

I met Kitty that ev'nin'. Stanley an' she were goin' into a theater, an' they stopped me an' talked. A nice little girl, not pretty, but not plain; an' as proud of Stanley as a mother hen of a brood of chicks. I said I hoped I'd see her again. She told me Stanley had said such wonderful things about me! Not more than I deserved, said Stanley. God help them both! Wonderful things, eh!

Next day—well, next day, everything crashed! The Codfish had been asked to supper by Kitty's mother. But first he was goin' to take her to buy a ring. He'd the money saved. He was full of himself an' her an' his happiness. Soon as we finished work for the day he was off ashore.

That night when I came aboard he was sittin' on one of the hatches, his head in his hands.

"Hullo, Harrington," he says. "Hullo!"

He stood up an' steadied himself against the drum of a winch an' I saw he was drunk.

"Harrington, it's all over. Finished. That ——, that old ——; I'll kill her!"

I grabbed hold of him an' took him into his berth.

"Now," I says, "what are you talkin' about?" He was snivellin' an' cryin'.

"The finest little girl in the world," he says, "an' that old cat turned her against me."

"How do you mean?" I says. "She says she can't marry a man who's done what I have! That wife of the chief's told her I wasn't fit to be goin around with a decent girl, an' Kitty won't marry me!"

An' that was that! But why had she interfered? She thought she was doin' right, I suppose. She always did. I was sorry for Stanley.

Dinner time next day Mrs. MacArkill came aboard for her husband. Stanley was on deck seein' to one of the winches that had broken down. I was in the engine-room. The mate told me what happened. Stanley spoke to her.

"Mrs. MacArkill," he says, "do you know what you've done?"

An' then he lowered his voice an' Joe couldn't hear what he said, but he told me she turned white an' he thought she was goin' to faint. But she didn't. She went to her husband's room. Poor Codfish!

A day or two later I passed her without seein' her. I was too mad. She told Andrew. Andrew spoke to me, straight. He was lookin' tired an' ill.

"I like you," he says, "personally. You know your job. But," says he, "I allow no man to be rude to my wife!"

"Quite!" says I.

"Well," says he, "why do it? You were rude to her yesterday. I won't have it. You understand?"

I understood right enough.

I was glad when we went to sea again. What with the chief an' his wife an' the old man an' the third an' the girl who'd chucked him, I was beginnin' to feel that there were points in common between the *Hydrangea* an' the old *Umballa*, after all.

This was my last voyage on the *Hydrangea*. We left Liverpool light to load in the Bristol Channel. At Swansea the chief went ashore with a couple of other chief engineers who were friends of his. Two o'clock in the mornin' I heard him stumblin' along the alley-way past my room, singin' hymns. When I reached him he was crawlin' on hands an' knees tryin' to find the keyhole. I opened the door an' put him to bed.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself,"

I says. "What would Mrs. MacArkill say if I told her, eh?"

He was too happy to care till next day when he woke with a head on him that would have turned the engines over without steam.

"Harrington," he says, "what's wrong with me? I'm feelin' awful!"

Poor Andrew!

"Chief," I says, "you were drunk!"

"No," he says, "I couldn't have been."

He didn't mention it again afterward. An' then, an ev'nin' or so after we reached New York, he came to my room, ravin'. In his hand was a letter.

"Harrington," he says, "what the —— did you want to write to my wife for?"

I couldn't have been more surprized if the mate's canary had started to bark like a dog!

"Write to your wife!" I says.

"Yes," says he. "My wife had an anonymous letter from some one, sayin' they brought me aboard ship at Swansea, drunk! You were the only one who knew. You wrote to her!"

I was so angry I felt like givin' him a clip under the jaw to teach him manners.

"I'll stand a good deal," I says, "but not that. Clear out, Mr. MacArkill, sharp!"

Andrew was like a madman.

"Did you or did you not write that letter to Ada?"

"No," I says. "I did not. An'," says I, "I'd like to know why the blazes you think I did!"

"You never liked Mrs. MacArkill," he says, whinin'. "You've done nothin' but run her down since you've been in the ship!"

I didn't argue. You can't. Not with a man like that, can you? I knew who'd written the letter, of course. Andrew ought to have known, too. I tell you, the *Hydrangea* was a happy ship just about then. I was gettin' fed up with the whole —— crowd! But, ——! The trouble had only begun!

WE WENT to West Indian ports next — dischargin' at Barbados, Trinidad an' Demarara—then we loaded for home, workin' north, Demarara, Trinidad, San Fernando an' La Prea, Barbados, Antigua, St. Lucia an' Dominica. Nothin' out of the ord'nary in that, of course; but what was out of the ord'nary was that one afternoon, when we were still in the West Indies, an' not long after I'd gone on watch, I saw the old man himself climbin' down the ladder into the engine-room.

"Mr. Harrington," he says, "I want to see for myself how much coal we've got in the bunkers!"

"Coal in the bunkers!" I says.

"What did you expect to find?" he says. "Mushrooms?"

"Shall I fetch the chief engineer, sir?" I says.

"No," he says, "the poor feller's asleep. I'll not have him disturbed. Lead on, Mr. Harrington; I'm in a hurry!"

Well, I didn't argue. Why should I? He was master an' he could do as he —— well pleased!

Did he want to see how much coal we had left? He did not. That was only a blind! What's a captain likely to know about coal in bulk, or the cubic capacity of the cross an' side-bunkers, eh? Eye-wash, of course. I only heard of one other skipper who ever went into the bunkers at all, an' he was next best thing to bein' a lunatic—three parts congenital, one part, alcoholic. No, old Kellam didn't want to know about coal, he was gettin' at Andrew, showin' him who was who!

I took him between the boilers into the stoke-hold an' on into the cross-bunkers. The old man nodded his head an' looked wise.

"Ah!" says he. "Very good! Just what I thought!"

He couldn't have said more if he'd really known! An' when we came out into the stoke-hold again, there was the chief, lookin' like thunder! "Ah! Mr. MacArkill!" says the old man. "So you're awake, are you! You'll be runnin' short of coal before long, won't you!"

He couldn't have hit on a bigger insult if he'd tried.

As soon as the old man had gone through into the engine-room an' had climbed the ladder, then came the row!

"What did you mean by darin' to take the captain into the bunkers for, eh?" says Andrew. "Why didn't you send for me at once?"

I wondered how much he'd say if I let him run on.

"You're not fit to be an engineer," he says. "You're ignorant of the first elementary principles of engine-room routine! You talk big! You make yourself out to be better an' know more than anyone else on board, an' I find you, deliberately, the moment my back's turned, doin' a mean, underhand thing like this! You can't deceive me, Harrington, I know what you are!"

"Who told you?" I says. "Your wife?" I shouldn't have said it, perhaps, but I had to.

"Yes," he says, "she did. I know all about you."

"Well, if you do," I says, "go an' tell someone else. Don't trouble to tell me, I know it already."

An' I left him standin' there by the blackboard, fair tremblin' with rage. Silly old fool! Why the blazes didn't he talk to the old man? But I'd made up my mind that I'd had enough. I'd finished.

I needn't have worried. Soon as we reached Liverpool I heard I was to go to London, as chief of the *Hollyhock*. Old MacCreel, the engineer superintendent, told me to pack my bag an' get clear of the *Hydrangea* as quick as I could. The *Hollyhock* was lyin' in the West India Dock, due to sail in less than a week. ——! An' my last ship as chief was the *Nagasaki*!

Stanley Hosdyke came to my room while I was gettin' my things together. His face was a kind of gray color an' his codfish eyes were sick-lookin', an' he'd aged ten years in the two that I'd known him.

"I wish I was comin' with you, Mr. Harrington," he says. "You're lucky!"

"You'll get something else before long, Stanley," I says.

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't," says he. "I'm goin' to see Kitty this ev'nin'. I've written again an' again, but she's not answered. Perhaps when she sees me, she'll treat me better. I hope so." But the poor Codfish spoke as though hope was the last thing he'd got left.

"Mr. Harrington, I've not forgotten," he says. "Mrs. MacArkill needn't think that I have. I'm a failure. I know it. If Kitty won't have me, I'll go one more voyage, just one, an' then I'll quit."

Later, I understood what he meant, but I didn't, then.

An' Andrew? Not even now had he dropped the idea that I was to blame for takin' the old man into the bunkers! He still believed I'd been tryin' to undermine his authority. Or that's what his manner implied, anyhow. I went to his room to say good-by. Mrs. MacArkill was there, too, sittin' on the settee. There was as much change in her as there was in Stanley. She looked older an' thinner, an' I remember thinkin' that she wasn't gettin' enough to eat.

Andrew an' she glared at me, like we'd been strangers an' not introduced. An' it's funny, but though I knew I was in the right, though the pair of them had treated me pretty bad, an' for no reason, yet before I'd been in that room two minutes I was feelin' I'd done something wrong an' been found out! An' how do you account for that, eh? I give it up!

"Chief," I says, "I'm goin'!" I held out my hand.

"Oh!" says Andrew, puttin' his own hands into his pockets. "Well, I hope you get on better on the *Hollyhock* than you've got on here!"

I laughed. Poor little Andrew!

"Well," I says, "we'll bear each other no malice, anyhow!" I says.

"Malice!" says he. "Who's talkin' about malice? Ever since you've been on the ship you've been doin' your best to make a fool of me! An' now you've got what you tried for. You're chief engineer, an' I hope you get a more reliable second than I've had!"

An' then modesty went by the board. The ancient spirit of the Harringtons was roused at last!

"That so!" says I. "Well, you won't get a second who'll do more for you in the way of coverin' up your mistakes than I have!" Crumbs! The flare went up.

"You!" says Andrew. "You, you misbegotten specimen! Don't you ever dare set foot in my engine-room as long as you live!" That for a threat, eh!

"I'm not crazy," I says. I turned to Mrs. MacArkill. "Mrs. MacArkill," I says, "I'd like you to understand I never wrote that letter about your husband."

She never answered. She just sat an' looked at me.

"What's more," I says, "whatever you've heard about me, from other people, you've no right to condemn me, nor spread reports about me, without bein' sure of your facts." An' then — why, then, she burst into tears.

An' Andrew? He looked first at his wife an' then at me. Then he patted her shoulder.

"Ada," he says. "Ada, dear heart, stop it."

Yes, those were the words he said. She kept on cryin'. I made for the door.

"Wait!" says Andrew. "I've not finished with you, Harrington! I've got something to tell you!"

He came close up to me, then, an' spoke so fast the words came tumblin' over each other.

"You despicable cur!" he says. Nice openin', wasn't it! "What do you mean by talkin' like that? My wife is sufferin' hardship an' poverty this very minute for me! Every penny I had in the world," he says, "is gone, an' my home as well! I trusted a man, though my wife warned me against him, an' I'm ruined. An' not once, —— you! Not once has she said one single word that would make me feel worse than I feel already. She's livin' in one room in a back street in Bootle, sewin' to earn money to help get us a new home! An' then I hear a waster like you talkin' against her! Treatin' her like dirt under your feet! Why, you're not fit to mention her name! No, nor breathe the same air as she does! What do you know about anything except your own —— mis'rable affairs? I hate the sight of you! You've got what you want, you've won! I've lost! There's nothin' between me an' my wife an' starvation but my job! If I lost that, I'd be on the streets; an' you, I suppose you'd be glad!"

An' what did I say to all that? I said nothin'. Not a ruddy word. I might have been dumb. Andrew, red in the face, shakin' with anger, his little round eyes very hard an' bitter, an' his wife, rockin' to an' fro on the settee, sobbin' her heart out! An' me—I felt—well, though I tried to think of Stanley Hosdyke an' Kitty, an' what Mrs. MacArkill had done for them an' for me, I felt like ——!

An' then—for a minute or two—silence; nobody spoke.

"You'd better go," says Andrew presently. "Clear out!"

Which I did. I'd wanted to make the pair of them feel ashamed of themselves an' they'd just about laid me out between them. But as I went along the alley-way to my own room I wondered. One man's wife is another man's poison. All the same, if Mrs. MacArkill could see herself ruined an' her home sold up an' everything she had in the world taken away from her an' not blame her husband for bein' the cause, then there was more good in her than I'd have thought possible from what I knew of her.

AN' SO I sailed as chief engineer once more, an' when I first stood on the plates of the *Hollyhock's* engine-room I felt like I hadn't felt for more years than I cared to think, an' something I'd lost came back to me. An' I was proud, —— proud, though I wouldn't have said so for worlds. An' I thanked God I was clear of the *Hydrangea* an' Andrew MacArkill an' his wife an' the Codfish an' Captain Kellam an' the rest of the bunch for ever! Ah! But was I? Listen.

Even with a company that more or less tries to keep its packets on reg'lar runs, you're bound to get changes. There's nothin' certain at sea. I'd made sure the *Hollyhock* would stay on the South African run. I was wrong. First thing I heard we were bound to New York. An', owin' to bein' held up, by one thing on top of another—too many ships in harbor, an' a cargo-sling breakin' an' droppin' a heavy weight down a hatch an' damagin' the top of the tunnel—we were longer in port than we ought to have been.

An' so we were still loadin' at the foot of 22nd Street when one cold mornin' I came up out of the engine-room an' saw the old *Hydrangea* with a couple of tugs in charge bringin' her in from the North River into the berth ahead of us. She'd come up light from Philadelphia, I think, an' was goin' to load at the same pier.

I was glad. Why, thinks I, here's a chance to see old Andrew MacArkill again an' the poor Codfish an' Joe Sternway an' hear all the news. Andrew! Why not? I knew what'd happen. He'd grin when he saw me comin' aboard an' he'd grab hold of my hands an' take me into his room an' settle down for an hour or so to tell me all about Ada! An' me, I'd listen. That's what I thought.

Dinner time I walked up the quay to where the *Hydrangea* was lyin' an' went on board. Stanley Hosdyke was the only one of the crowd I could see. He was still the same old mis'rable, putty-faced, fish-eyed Stanley I'd left at Liverpool.

"Mr. Harrington," he says, "I want to talk to you!"

Not a smile on his face. Not a word he was glad to see me. Nothin'.

"How are you doin', Stanley?" I says. "Tell me."

"There's nothin' to tell," he says.

"What about Kitty?" I says. "Is she goin' to marry you?"

We were in his room. He dropped on to his settee an' laughed till I thought he'd make himself sick.

"Mr. Harrington," he says, "don't try an' be funny. It doesn't suit you. Leave that kind of thing to Mr. MacArkill!"

An' then he told me the girl wouldn't look at him. A man as bad as what Mrs. MacArkill had said Stanley was, wasn't a fit man to be seen about with, let alone have for a sweetheart! No, Kitty was scared. She'd told him he'd best forget her an' find someone else. Poor Codfish! he took it hard.

"Stanley," I says, "the odds are she'll marry you yet!"

"Mr. Harrington," he says, "you don't know her. If Kitty's made up her mind she won't have me, she won't. Why in —— couldn't Mrs. MacArkill have let us be? What harm had I done her? She's ruined my life just through that —— tongue of hers!" An' then he whispered. "But, Mr. Harrington, make no mistake. I'm goin' to get even."

"How?" I says. He looked crazy, sittin' there, with his eyes bulgin' an' a grin on his face.

"How?" He winked. "That's tellin'. If I can't touch her, there's always her husband. An'," says he, "I'm —— if I know which of the pair I hate most!"

Then I left him. I wanted to find Andrew to give him a word of warnin'. I had to. Not my business, of course, but I didn't like Stanley's look. On my way to his room I ran into Joe Sternway. After I had a talk with him, I saw old Kellam, an' then the second an' third mates. Last of all, I got a chance of a word with Andrew.

He came out of the alleyway that led to his room.

"Hullo, Andrew!" I says. "How are you?"

The little man put his hands in his pockets, just as he'd done when I said good-by, an' looked me square in the face.

"I told you before," he says; "I'll tell you again. I can't keep you off the ship, if the captain allows you to come aboard, but," he says, "I can keep you out of the engine-room an' the engineers' quarters, an', by ——, I will!"

The —— fool! I turned an' left him. What was the good of tryin' to do a good turn to an obstinate old mummy like him? An' I thought to myself I'd see him drown before I'd lift my little finger to save him! I'd tried to be friends with the man, an' he'd as good as told me to get to —— out of it! What's more, I'd put my pride in my pocket an' come to him, instead of him comin' to me, as he ought to have done. After that I went back to the *Hollyhock*. The Codfish could do as he pleased. He couldn't do much, anyway.

I'd been lookin' forward to a quiet ev'nin' on board ship by myself, with my pipe an' a couple of magazines an' no one to talk to. I wasn't goin' ashore; I'd seen enough of New York to last me the rest of my giddy life. All I wanted was peace an' quiet, an' I'd turn in early an' get some sleep. An' so I wasn't best pleased when I heard some one come hurryin' in through the alleyway an' bang at the door with his fists an' shout—

"Harrington, open the door, for God's sake!"

I knew the voice. Something was wrong. I jumped to my feet, quick, an' turned the key in the lock. Joe Sternway clutched at me.

"Harrington," he says, "come quick! The chief an' the second are on shore, an' I can't find the third."

He was out of breath an' could hardly speak. I put on my cap an' went with him.

"What's wrong?" I says.

He told me.

"The Codfish was left to do some job or other on board. He's gone, an' the water's pourin' into the *Hydrangea's* stoke-hold!"

Get that? I ran along that quay quicker'n I'd run for years. Water in the stoke-hold, eh! I heard Joe explainin' in gasps that he hadn't known what to do, an' he'd come for me! He was scared, an' I didn't blame him. I was scared myself.

"Joe," I says, "what was the Codfish supposed to be doin'? Did you hear?"

"Yes," he says, "he was blowin' a boiler down."

I didn't wait. I went into the fiddley an' stood on the gratin' by the ash-hoist engine an' listened. Sure enough the water was comin' into the stoke-hold. But how? I climbed down the ladder, with the mate after me. An' then I stopped. It was worse than I thought.

"My God, Joe!" I says. "The water's about six feet deep, already!"

"Where's it comin' from?" he says.

"Through the boiler door," I says. "An' if we don't make haste we'll have the —— ship sinkin' under us!"

MR. HARRINGTON broke off in the midst of his story to smile.

"An' that's what it would have done. She was fillin' fast!"

"Well," I said. "How did you stop it?"

"Do you know what had happened?" asked Mr. Harrington.

I shook my head. "No!"

Mr. Harrington leaned back in his chair and continued talking in his slow, quiet way, no longer smiling but very serious.

ANDREW had left the third engineer on board to blow down the port boiler (he said.) You understand what I mean by that? No? Well, I'll try an' explain. The simplest an' best way of gettin' a boiler ready to work in is to let it cool of its own accord an' then in a couple of days' time, pump it out. But supposin' you're in a hurry? Well, then, it's diff'rent. You blow down.

As a gen'ral rule these days you don't blow down a boiler unless you have to. But on one of the old type boilers such as we had on the *Hydrangea*, with a pressure of only eighty to a hundred pounds, the job was as safe as nailin' tin-tacks into a carpet. Always provided, of course, that nothin' went wrong. An', equally, of course, that the engineer in charge of the job knew how to do his work, an' didn't go trailin' off after a drink or a girl—like it seemed the Codfish had done—as soon as the chief's back was turned.

But the Codfish knew what to do as well as anyone. Then why had he gone? An' how did it come about that the water was floodin' into the stokehold through the lower door of the boiler? Even if he'd remained on board, he'd taken a risk that no man in his right mind should have dared! He'd slacked the studs of the lower door off—get that? the lower boiler door—an' taken the dogs off! That's what he'd done in cold blood, an' gone ashore all by himself! An' why?

Do you know what happens if you're blowin' down? It's simple—simple as catchin' butterflies. You must draw the fires, if they're not dead, naturally, an' flood the ashes with water from the ash-cock, so there'll be no steam to rise. See! Then you're ready to start. The blow-down cocks on the boilers you're not blowin' down, you shut off; the one that you're doin' you open; an' you open the ship-side blow-down cock, as well. An' then you're blowin' down. Hard an' fast. See?

Directly the pressure inside the boiler equals the pressure outside, you're finished. Simple, isn't it? As the pressures approach each other, goin' slower an' slower, the pipes start cracklin', an' the engineer on duty, not bein' a lunatic, keeps touchin' the blow-down pipe with his hand. When the sea-water pressure equals the boiler pressure, the pipe will get cool an' he knows, without troublin' his head about gauges, that the sea-water is in the pipe an' he must shut off the cock in the ship's side at once. If he don't, if the pressure outside is greater than the pressure inside the boiler, you're goin' to have trouble. An' trouble it was on the *Hydrangea!*

The boiler that Stanley Hosdyke had been left in charge of had been blown down—it was empty—the pressure had gone below zero—an' therefore you had a vacuum. See! All the water was out of the boiler, all the air was out, too. What happened? The lower door from which the Codfish had taken the dogs fell in on to the boiler floor an' the water which poured back from the sea through the blow-down cock found an outlet into the stokehold.

An' that's what I saw when I climbed down the ladder with Joe Sternway holdin' a hurricane-lamp for light. I knew what to do. The question was could I do it? I thought that I could. I'd try it, at least.

"Joe," I says. "I've got to shut off the cock in the ship-side."

"How are you goin' to do it?" he says.

I gave him my jacket an' waistcoat an' cap.

"Hold these!" I says.

An' then—why, then, I dived into six feet of ice-cold river water, black with coal-dust an' muck, that was floodin' the stokehold! I knew where the cock was. I knew that I'd find the handle in place, because when the cock is open, you can't lift the handle at all. You must shut it first. I dived an' groped under water with both hands an' something hard came crash against the top of my skull an' I had to come to the surface to breathe. God! I was cold.

An' then I swam to the ladder an' Joe holdin' the lamp, an' I climbed till I was out of the water up to my knees.

"Can you do it?" says Joe.

"I must!" says I.

I felt sick with worry. Supposin' I failed! I thought of old Andrew an' what he'd do if his engines were ruined an' then I dived in again. This time I reached the stringers an' I caught hold of the handle an' steadied myself an' shut off the cock hard. An' then—why, then, I came to the surface once more an' swam to the ladder an' Joe's lamp an' hauled myself out like a drowned rat, shiverin' cold an' drenched to my bones an' black from my hair to my feet, except for the blood that was tricklin' down from my scalp. I was in a mess!

Joe helped me on deck. I stood in a pool of water an' put my jacket on over my wet shirt.

"Now," I says, "where's that —— Codfish got to?" I was shakin' so I could hardly talk. "Joe," I says, "you've got to find him. Tell him to get the pumps started. If he doesn't," I says, "he'll lose his job. An' so will Andrew!"

I went off, then, back to the *Hollyhock*. As I was runnin' along the quay, someone spoke to me. The Codfish.

"Stanley," I says, "what the blazes are you doin' here?"

He laughed.

"What's wrong?"

"Why did you leave the ship when you were blowin' down?"

"Why not?" he says. An' then I knew.

"You swine!" I says. "You dirty, mean little swine! You did it on purpose! You wanted the *Hydrangea* to sink!"

"I did," he says. "An' it will. Do you hear, Harrington? It will! An' the chief will be fired! He'll lose his job, an' where will he get another, eh?"

An' then I grabbed hold of his throat an' pressed my fingers into his wind-pipe an' shook him till his teeth rattled in his head an' I thought that I'd better stop or he'd croak.

"Listen!" I says. "The *Hydrangea* won't sink. I've turned off the cock in the side. Did you think I was takin' a walk up Broadway the way I am? I've been havin' a swim in the —— stoke-hold. You'll go back on board," I says, "an' start up the pumps an' get that water out of the stoke-hold an' engine-room. Understand? Maybe you'll save your job an' the chief's as well. Murder's bad, but wreckin' a ship's engines is worse! Get a move on, now, or I'll half-kill you!"

He went off, then, without sayin' a word.

As soon as I'd got my wet clothes off, an' rubbed myself down with a towel an' drunk something hot an' dressed again, I was back aboard the *Hydrangea*. Stanley had got the pumps workin' all right—the engine-room was higher than the stoke-hold so he could do this easy—an' he used the donkey-boiler on deck.

He was wadin' around in three foot of water, an' I didn't go near him. I didn't have to. I saw by the light of a lamp on his face he was sufferin' hell, just the same as I'd suffered hell myself, again an' again. But he was better than me! Poor —— silly old Codfish, with his little mind an' his broken heart! Yes, better than me. He could point to some other human bein' an' say that there was the person who'd driven him where he was, an' that was more than I'd ever been able to say in my life!

I stood on the gratin's, watchin'. An' I was there when Joe found me. We went on deck.

"Harrington," he says, "what am I goin' to do, eh?"

"I think I can guess," I says.

"Yes," says he. "You can guess. But I wanted to ask permission."

"It's nothin' to do with me," I says.

"It has," says Joe. "If I don't talk, nobody'll know what you've done tonight!"

See? That's what that big gawk said, there in the darkness outside the engine-room casing, with the lights of the city like a million Glory Hallelujahs in the sky an' the wind like a knife edge.

"Fathead!" I says. "Joe, you say a word about me an' there'll be trouble."

An' then I walked back to the *Hollyhock* an' I sat in my bunk an' tried to puzzle things out an' couldn't. I'd saved Andrew his job! But why?

Two days later we were ready for sea. I'd seen no one from off the *Hydrangea*. Not even the Codfish! We were catchin' the afternoon tide, an' about nine o'clock in the mornin' I was havin' a look round the engine-room when the mess-room steward came down the ladder to say I was wanted on deck. Andrew MacArkill was waitin' at the engine-room door.

"Harrington," he says, "I'd like to speak to you."

He looked a poor little thing, all to pieces, worn out an' tired an' not quite sure of himself. I took him into my room.

"Harrington," he says, "I heard what you did the night before last."

What could I say! Nothin'. I waited. There were tears in his eyes.

"Harrington," he says, "if I'd lost my job, if I'd got my ticket suspended, I'd have been on the scrap-heap an' my wife would have starved! Maybe I can't say what I feel, but I'll never forget."

"Andrew," I says, "you drop it! I dunno what in the world you're talkin' about."

"Yes," he says, "but I do. The third told me."

An' then Andrew said he was sorry for all he'd said.

"I was wrong, Harrington," he says. "I don't know what come over me. I've hated you. For no reason. An' you've saved me an' my wife from ruin." He could hardly speak. The talk was becomin' painful.

"Andrew," says I, "what you want is a good big drink—or a dose of medicine—you drop it."

He stood up to go.

"Harrington," he says, "maybe we won't be home when you reach Liverpool. But," says he, "I'll write an' ask Ada to see you an' thank you herself for all that you've done for both of us."

"Lord, Andrew," I says, "I wouldn't do that. Don't put Mrs. MacArkill to all that trouble, please."

"Harrington," he says, "it'll be a pleasure to Ada to do it."

"I dunno about that, Andrew," I says. An' I felt more an' more that unless I did something desp'rate he'd set me an' his wife scrappin' again. But what do you think he said? A sensible man, too, in most ways!

"Harrington," he says, "you're puttin' too slight a value on your own qualities. My wife is a wonderful judge of character! an' barrin' myself, which is natural in a wife, she's a higher opinion of you, Harrington, than of any man in the world!"

An' with that lie on his conscience Andrew MacArkill said good-by to me.

"THAT'S all! That's the story of how I saved the *Hydrangea* from sinkin'. Satisfied, eh?'

Mr. Harrington laughed.

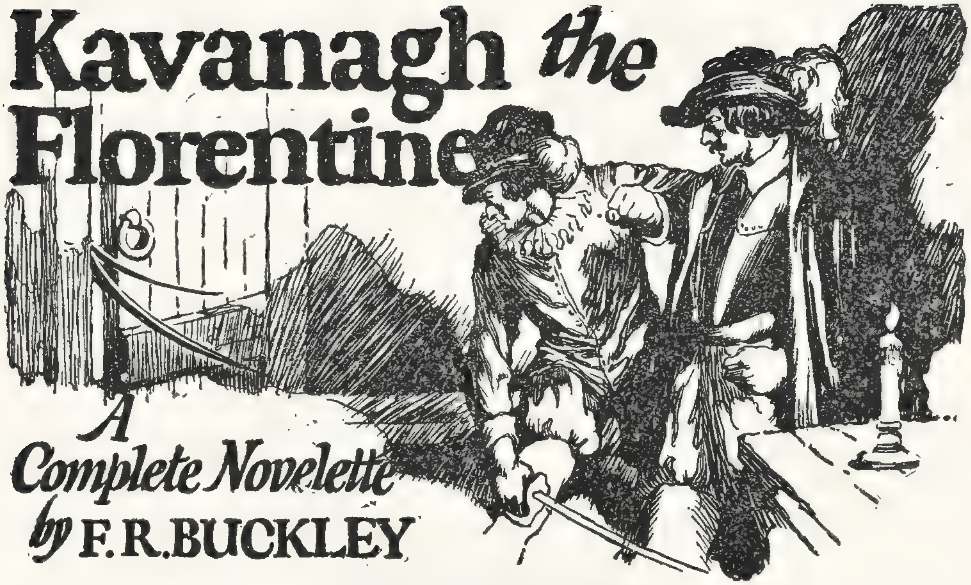
"Did you meet Mrs. MacArkill?" I asked.

"A couple of years later I did," said Mr. Harrington. "Funny enough, too, it was when I came up to Liverpool from London to Stanley Hosdyke's weddin'. The Codfish had left the sea, then, of course! He'd left it, as a matter of fact, soon as he got home after he'd tried to sink the *Hydrangea*. He's dairy farmin' in Cheshire these days! Lucky man, eh! But, crumbs! What's the Codfish know about cows? A typical farmer. Guess-work, that's all. An' ignorance! But he's makin' a livin' an' he's happy."

"Wait a bit!" I said. "Did he marry the girl, Kitty, you were talking about?"

"Of course," said Mr. Harrington placidly. "Didn't I say so? Girls are like that, aren't they? I'll tell you how it came about some day; an' how the Codfish got money enough to set up for himself. But Mrs. MacArkill, now! I met her. What do you think she told me, without movin' an eyelash? She said that all she'd heard from Charley Williams, her brother, about me, was how I'd rowed in the life-boat that Plug Fergusson had taken across from the *Mysore* years before to save the crew of the *Muriel Stevens!* I didn't argue, or contradict her. But knowin' the things that Charley Williams could have said, I didn't believe her!"

Kavanagh the Florentine



A Complete Novelette

by F. R. BUCKLEY

Author of "Yellow Treasure."

BEHOLD, I build a monument to a man who is still alive—being faster both in thrust and parry than any other now on earth—and who, since he is at these presents an adventurer in the Americas, will likely never know of the same. I would that I could chisel this story upon marble, so that even our Duke Cosimo II might see it and remember; but assuredly there would be a scandal in Florence if Benedetto degli Rozzi turned stone-mason in the midst of his honors, and so I write on this unenduring stuff. Since, in these days, mere gratitude is no valid reason for the performance of any act, let us say that I am impelled to the work by last Sunday's sermon at the Duomo, which dealt with the fate of one in Scripture—how, giving not credit where the same was due, he incontinently burst asunder.

Know then, ye bourgeois who are again meddling in government for your petty profits, and whom I perceive to point me out to your children as a man to be imitated—one who has raised himself to favor by his own strength and cunning—that on a bitter night in November, no longer ago than the year of our Lord Jesus Christ 1536—I, who have since been named the Glorious, was a twenty-year old starveling in a puce doublet, plum-colored hose, sieve-like boots, and a hat with a broke-backed feather; crouching behind a chimney on a roof in the Via Nuova while a snowstorm on the wings of an icy gale swept the city of Florence; waiting for a bribed duenna to open a trap-door; cloakless—I had sold it to buy food; swordless—for that was in pawn for the money to bribe the duenna; and honorless, meseemed, since I had embarked on this passion for Allegra Ginori, whose wealth was as far above my poverty as was my birth above hers. I was far along the road to a bad end, truly, and traveling fast; and farther along the same way, and traveling faster, was the whole city, then under the rule of Duke Alessandro.

Both of which careers were turned about by one man, whom ye, seeing him in the street tomorrow, would eye with a great contempt; but to whom I raise this small memorial.—ARCANGELO KAVANAGH.

I WOULD have it understood, in this preface, natheless, that this illicit adventure on which I was engaged was no base intrigue—no handkerchief-dropping, hand-squeezing, caterwauling business. I would as soon have offered insult to a nun, as a kiss to Allegra. We had met when certain fellows stopped her chair near the Gate of the Prato—I had my sword then, being still only a month in Florence—

"*Kavanagh the Florentine*," *copyright, 1922, by F. R. Buckley.*

and I had fallen in love with the voice that thanked me from the half-darkness, even as she had conceived pity—which is much the same thing—for my hungry face.

Whereafter, knowing better than to present my rags at the front door of her uncle's palazzo, I had corrupted the duenna and written and received two letters. My first had protested my devotion, detailed the excellence of my ancestry and confessed my poverty. Her reply, to my equal dismay and delight, had hinted that she stood in some trouble or danger; and her last note, sent in answer to my ardent offer of my sword for her defense—it was pawned by this time, but the fact slipped my mind—had arranged this rendezvous for ten at the trap-door on the roof.

Ten o'clock had long since boomed from the tower of the church across the street—a tower invisible through the swirling whiteness of the snowstorm; nay, I had heard the thud and jingle of the watch as it struggled through the drifts on its round of the hour before midnight; and still the trap-door remained closed. Hunkering there in the dark, my feet and hands senseless and blue, the disreputable plume of my hat slapping wetly across my eyes, my despair increased with every passing minute. I dared not walk about to warm myself—and the flat space of the roof was barely two cloth-yards long—lest my footsteps be heard in the house below. I could only sit and freeze—and think, which on the whole was worse than the freezing. For what came to my mind at this lowest ebb of my fortunes were my father's words on the night before I set out to seek my fortune in Florence.

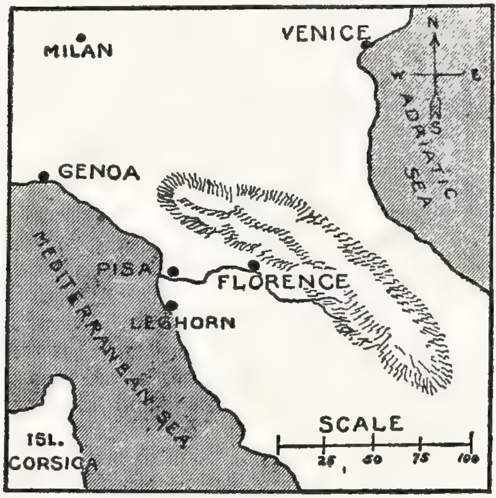
"Years in which the figure five is repeated, Benedetto," he had said, stretching out his thin old hands to the fire in the great hall, "have from time immemorial proved favorable to the restoration of fortunes; even as dates containing a two and a seven, together making the accursed figure of nine, have ever been notable for calamities to those of noble birth. Thus, mark me, it was in '27 that yon howling mob of commoners drove the Medici from Florence, and accordingly brought the fortunes of our family to their present melancholy state. Thus again, this year of '35 finds the Duke Alessandro firmly established on the chair of his ancestors, his duchy confirmed by the Emperor Charles and the King of France, and the deadliest of his enemies dealt with according to their deserts, for which God be thanked.

"It is true that the duke has seemed so far to forget my services to his family, and that he has even ignored the letter I sent him, asking that he commission thee in his guards; but we must remember that the times are not peaceful, and that his attention has been directed to vital matters of state. His Grace's cousin, the Cardinal Ippolito, until his death, did continually plot and contrive against him—they say this new Pope Paul is very hostile—and within the city, the vulgar mob howls that it was promised a republic when the city surrendered to the Emperor, and that instead he has given them a tyrant. Furthermore, in Venice Filippo Strozzi broods over his exile, and strives to raise armies——

"I would have thee beware the Strozzi. Filippo has a deadly *rinverso tondo*, designed to cut out an adversary's eyes, and his wife scruples not to practise against her enemies by poison— But, as I say, these matters have filled the duke's mind; it will be different when he sees thee in person. And I am persuaded—" here he smiled at me lovingly, I being his only son—"that with the aid of St. Francis, and the few tricks of the sword I have shown thee, thou wilt bring us credit."

In the morning, he had sent me forth with all that remained of our family pomp after disastrous fighting in the late war and the even more disastrous lending to the Medici cause—old Piero, in rusty armor, on a plow-horse, bearing our gonfalon; two footmen with borrowed swords and a page in faded livery, to escort me as far as the village whence the main road struck west to the city. I was heartily glad, thinking of his high hopes, that I had not had money wherewith to send him messengers, as I had promised; for my story would have broken his heart. In brief, the Duke Alessandro, absorbed in his beastly debauches, intent only on his drunken frolics and his women, had forgotten the name of Giacopo degli Rozzi as perfectly as those against whom my father had fought, remembered it.

At the Palazzo Ricciardi I was ignored; at the Palazzo Vecchio, where I at last begged a fat bourgeois for admission to the ranks of the town guard, I was insulted. As for the rest of the city, it repulsed me. The citizens were plotting against the council; the council was plotting against the duke; the nobles were plotting against the citizens the duke, the council and each other; while all parties, in their scheming, trucked greatly with the exiles of Sienna, Lucca, and Venice, headed by Filippo Strozzi, whose wife, being of the Medici, had some vague claim to the dukedom; enough to give excuse for conspiring, to men who did not care to admit they sought merely their own interest. Every morning new corpses swung from the windows of the Bargello; spies abounded —men could scarce trust their own families.



So that, as I found, an unknown young man in search of his fortune was ten times more likely to be accommodated with a dagger in the back, than with ducats in the pocket. Twice already I had escaped assassination in pursuit of the wherewithal to live; and now, after a period of frequenting pot-houses and there writing love verses for gallants too thick-headed to compose them for themselves, I was face to face with the worst peril of all—that of both death and disgrace.

If I was discovered in this adventure, I should assuredly be slain, unarmed as I was; my body dragged out into the snow and left there to be found after the thaw; all for love of a commoner and, what was worse, the niece of a republican so violent that my father would have rejoiced to hang him with his own hands!

The wind, suddenly veering to the north, snatched up the curtain of snow which covered the city, hurled it high in the air, and let my eyes stare out across the pointed roofs of Florence. With the blanket of white on their gables, they looked like an assemblage of their own inhabitants—venerable *signors* bending their gray heads over puddles of blood and poison.

There was one house, with a ruddy glare of lamp-light streaming from two windows set like eyes under its beetling roof, that reminded me of old Ugo Ginori himself, as he had been pointed out to me one day; a grim, thin-faced old man with blazing black eyes, snowy hair, thin, claw-like fingers, and a cruel white slit of a mouth, across which, from time to time, he would furtively draw the fur-trimmed cuff of his gown. . . .

Something was wrong with me, I thought drowsily, as with a howl of wind, the snowstorm swept down again more fiercely than before. My thoughts were strangely hazy and disconnected; my business on the roof, and the mystery of the still grimly closed trap-door, seemed to have lost their importance; and moreover, my arms and legs, hitherto as lost to me as if they had been cut off, were beginning to glow with a warmth which was spreading to the rest of my body, endowing me with a sense of the utmost luxury and an overpowering desire to go to sleep.

But for the sudden boom of midnight from the tower, I should doubtless have slept, to be found the next morning, or the next, or the next, dead behind my chimney, with one of Allegra's letters under my doublet, to the everlasting ruin of her fame. The dull thunder of the great bell roused me just a little—to a point where, realizing what depended, I could struggle against the awful lassitude which the cold was wrapping around my dinnerless body. It was as painful a task as dragging the carcass back from veritable death, but my teeth in my dead lip, I awoke and tried to get on my feet. I could not—my knees would not support me—there seemed to be no atom of strength left in my body. Yet—the words thundered through my brain—my corpse must not be found where it now lay.

I stared desperately around me—the white covering which lay over everything let me see dimly where I was. My own length away, up the slope of the roof, was the trap-door; but it profited me nothing. I could not have crawled to it, nor could I have raised it, even supposing it unlocked; and even so, I could not enter the house guideless—that were to defeat my own object. The drain-pipe up which I had come offered no means of retreat, since my limbs had failed me. And I had now given up hope of the duenna. Either there had been treachery, or some unforeseen event had prevented her from carrying out her engagement.

I realized that there was only one thing to be done. My death, in any case, was assured. The only problem was to keep my sweet Allegra's repute unsullied. Scarce knowing what I did, too intent on my object to regard the agony which, strangely enough, limbs dead with frost can give when they are bruised, I crawled to the edge of the roof and looked over. Mercifully I could not see the ground, fifty feet or more below; the flying snow was too thick for that. To my paralyzed brain, it seemed that below me was spread a carpet of miraculous softness, into which it would be delicious to fall.

I was therefore shocked almost back to consciousness when, having dragged myself forward by my hands until my body dived head foremost off the roof amid a flurry of snow, I was brought to a stop after only a few seconds' fall, with a jar that made my whole body tingle and a blinding light to flash before my eyes; which light I at first thought to be a glimpse of the splendor of heaven, into which I conceived myself to have been violently ushered.

An instant later, however, I perceived that this happy consummation had not yet been achieved; that, on the contrary, I was more alive than I had been for some time, being now out of the direct blast of the wind and snow, lying full length on the broad outer sill of an embrasured window.

The curtains were drawn, but at one place, in a line with my eyes as I lay there, they had fallen apart, emitting a bright ray of light from the dozen candles on a table at whose head I perceived Ugo Ginori to be sitting, with half a dozen men to his right and left; some venerable like himself, some young and richly dressed, of whom I recognized only one—the fat lieutenant I had seen at the Bargello, and who had refused me admission to his villainous town-guard.

At the moment I saw him, this fool leaped to his feet and turned a face full of terror directly at my window.

"What was that?" he screamed.

The noise of my fall must have been slight, since they were some distance from the closed window, and I had dropped on snow piled two feet deep on the sill before the wind shifted; but fear has sharp ears, and this coward's face glistered in the candlelight with the sweat of terror. The others regarded him with contempt. One, a tall fellow in a breastplate, took him by the shoulder and threw him back into his chair.

"Another squeak from thee, Gianni," he growled, "and, *corpo di Bacco*, I'll cut your throat in good earnest. The town-guard can be bought too dear, by the Cross—not counting that I could hide thy body in a ditch and make a man out of mud who would manage it better than thou. If a fall of snow from the roof makes thee scream, what might the duke's thumbscrews make thee tell?"

The other men at the table nodded grimly.

"Is that all it was—in verity, the snow?" gasped the fat man. "Yes, truly, of course. I am myself again. And let me tell you, gentles, that though I am afflicted with a nervousness when suddenly come upon, I am of a most resolute disposition. Let the duke try me with his thumbscrews—nay, and his pincers and his rack and his boot, forsooth; and so long as I have whole bones in my fingers I will put them to my nose at him. And with my last breath I will fill the torture chamber with a cry of '*Viva Filippo Str——*' "

As if stabbed from behind, the whole gathering started up from its seats. Like a flash of lightning, the tall man in the breastplate, raising his fist, struck the fat boaster a blow in the mouth which knocked him backward over his chair and laid him sprawling and howling on the floor.

"Od's nig and nog, sirs," I heard him say to the rest, "here is a perilous fellow. He trembleth or he boasteth, and either way, he knots the rope for our necks."

As the wretch on the floor started to scramble, blubbering, to his feet, the man above him drew a poniard from his belt and held it before the eyes of the conspirators. For a moment they seemed undecided, looking from the dagger to old Ugo Ginori, whose blazing eyes held both the executioner and the victim in consideration. Then he shook his head. Reluctantly, the tall man put up his dagger and, grasping Gianni by the scruff of the neck, jerked him to his feet.

Deliberately and slowly, the old man at the head of the table addressed the wretch.

"Silence!" he said, striking the table with his fist so that the candles flickered.

Gianni's bawling stopped as if cut off with a knife.

"Look you, fellow," said the old man, "no more of this! This is thy second warning and the last. Let me hear that thou hast whispered one word, waking, sleeping, or drunk, concerning ever so remotely any one of us, and I will have thy tongue torn out. Mark me!"

He shot a lean finger at the coward, who started back as if it had been a sword-blade.

"One word—and thy tongue torn out. Remember."

He sat down again.

"Send him away," he ordered.

The tall man thrust Gianni out of the room and flung his cloak, hat and sword after him.

"I see no reason," the giant said sulkily, as he seated himself again, "why ever he should have been here. We need him not yet."

"As much reason as for thy being here, beef-head," snarled old Ugo, "since we need thee not yet, either. The more the wench sees of thy sweltering brawn before marriage, the more trouble to me. Even now, she yearneth after some starveling whose only merit is that he is everything that thou art not, thou loud emptiness, thou gostering fish-head. Be silent! The girl is locked in her room, and thou nor any one can see her."

He contemplated his claws. My heart gave a leap at the mention of Allegra, then seemed to stop beating. What had this blackguard with his lowering brows, his great jaw and his ape's forehead to do with her?

"It goes ill with my conscience," said Ugo without looking up, "to do as I am doing; but what would you? More money we must have, for Battista and the Black Bands will not move without the certainty of it. All that I had at large have I sent already to Strozzi—enough to buy the Bands twice over, curse him, and he has spent it hiring some cheap ragtag of Venetian cavalry at four times its price—for which there shall be a reckoning when the revolution is safe—a heavy reckoning. Now, this niece of mine hates me; and if I touched a ducat of her fortune the duke would know it by a thousand mouths. All I can do is marry her at my pleasure, as her father gave me the power. And, as we have decided, there is none but this lump we can trust as bridegroom."

"How much more doth Battista demand before he will actually draw sword?" growled one man.

"No business of thine," said Ginori, "since I have paid him what he demanded to wait and shall pay him this also."

"And when is't to be?" asked one of the others—a shopkeeper, by the look of him.

"The marriage can be done by this se'-night," said Ugo, talking, for all his protestation, as if he were considering when he might count on the money from the sale of a sheep. "And the money can be ready a month thereafter. We must not meet before then; so do thou, Scoronconcolo, be ready when I shall send a messenger to thee."

He addressed a lowering fellow at the foot of the table, who, raising my head to see clearly, I perceived to wear at his belt the steel glove of the paid murderer. Also, moving thus, I found that the strength was creeping back into my arms, now that the wind blew not on me; and that, with effort, I could move my legs. Carefully, lest they should hear within the room, I began to chafe my knees. The drain-pipe by which I had ascended ran close by the window and, with renewed hope, I thought that, after a little I might be able to grasp it and climb down to the ground. But it was not to be so.

"Is it to be a long ride?" asked the bravo, "I—I—would make provision of horses."

Old Ugo Ginori cackled a shrill laugh and shot out a stick-like finger.

"Very clever, fool," he chuckled, "but 'twill not do. Others have tried to find out where the Black Bands are—my beautiful regiment of cavalry that shall make me so powerful, he-he! Filippo Strozzi has tried it, and he is cleverer than thou, so butt not they head against the wall, my Scoronconcolo. Be not curious, lest I suspect thee of designs on thine own account—or Strozzi's. Listen, all ye—I pay the Black Bands, and they are mine. Mine! I lead this affair—not Strozzi. And not until I choose shall their whereabouts be known. Mark that, and let none try to pry into my secrets!"

Suddenly his eyes blazed around the table; there was a shrinking from him.

"Well, how shall I know the messenger?" growled the Scoronconcolo sullenly, rising as all save Ginori now rose.

"Because he will have the money," said the old man.

He considered a moment, eyes smoldering.

"And, further, since the Duke would cheerfully send thee a bag of ducats if he could get his hands on us," he added, "this messenger shall also say to thee, in a low voice, the words 'Lawful wedlock.' I cannot think that any spy of the Duke's would dare mock his master with those words."

All in the room laughed, as well they might, for the duke's obscurity of birth was such, as all know, that he had lately poisoned his mother that she might not betray it. Even Ugo smiled palely as he arose.

It was at this moment, when the laugh had died down, and there was silence as the conspirators reached for the swords, cloaks and hats which they had flung down about the room, that, by the most accursed ill-luck, the sole remaining tinsel button on my sleeve struck the window-pane sharply. In my excitement, I had forgotten to use care in the chafing of my legs. And the next moment, before I could reach for the drain-pipe—which in any case would not have served me—the Scoronconcolo had leaped for the window, dragging on his steel glove as he sprang.

Incontinently, without pausing for a prayer, I hurled myself off the window-ledge. It seemed like certain death for, in the narrow street below, the snow could not have drifted deep enough to break my fall from such a height. But I had the letter still about me and I had a confused idea that I was protecting Allegra. Of the plot against the duke, I thought nothing as I hurtled downward through the still air—for the storm had abated, and the moon was now out, which—in view of what follows—I trust will not convey the opinion that the Divine Providence is kinder to lovers than to loyalists. I must confess, however, that this thought occurred to me when, turning in mid-air, I perceived that my second fall from the accursed elevation of that house was to be interrupted.

A man, whom even from above, in the whirling terror of my fall, I could see to have his legs braced and his arms spread to catch me, was waiting below, close to the foot of the wall!

A fraction of a second more, and I had crashed into him, bruising my ribs against the ridge of his breastplate, and by the force of my fall sending the pair of us rolling over and over into a shallow snowdrift, where we both lay finally, heavy of breath but unhurt.

"Thank God," gasped a voice in my ear, as for a moment I lay staring at the oblong of the window, against which now appeared the figures of men wrestling with the frozen panes, "that — th' — art half-starved. Another ounce—th' wouldst—have burst me."

Gasping still, yet with the motion of a released spring, he sprang to his feet.

"Woof! Up, boy. Up!"

I struggled and he assisted me. The moon was behind a cloud and I could see nothing of this stranger, save that he was of mine own height—which was then six feet—but beyond comparison more thickset. His breastplate, which glistened with the reflection from the snow, would have compassed two of me, and his grip was the grip of a vise. Further, he spoke our Tuscan tongue in a most strange manner—as if, it seemed, it was too fragile a language for his tongue, even as an arrow is no missile to be fired from a demi-cannon.

"I am obliged to thee," he said, knocking the snow from my clothes and his own with blows that would have slain dogs, "for that drain-pipe would never have borne my weight, and my thirst for knowledge would have compelled me to climb it. And thou art obliged to me for slaying this gentleman, whom I found taking aim at thy perch with a petronel. Wherefore we will drink together if thou hast any money, and that quickly. Come!"

The window above flew open, letting out at once sufficient light to let me see a crumpled figure with a petronel beside it on the snow at my feet, and to let fall on my ears excited chatterings of the conspirators, through which the deep tones of the Scoronconcolo boomed like a drum, and the thin, commanding voice of old Ugo Ginori cut knife-wise.

"Kill both—kill both!" cried Ugo. "Their blood or ours!"

I wondered at his daring to call so loudly—though there was but a church across the way to hear him; but wonder was cut short by the sound of the Scoronconcolo coming down the stairs four steps at a leap. The stranger grasped my arm and pulled me toward the mouth of an alleyway.

"Judging by their consternation," he

muttered, forcing me into a run, "thou hast heard somewhat of interest. This is fortune. I——"

My numbed legs made me stumble and almost fall. At the same moment, we heard the crash of Ginori's great street door flung wide, and the thud of pursuing footsteps in the snow. Passing one arm around me, the man at my side lifted me entirely from my feet and, crushing me close to him, swung me into another alleyway opening off the first—from one door of which issued a broad beam of ruddy light, illuminating a signboard bearing the effigy of a red swan.

At that time, Florence being full of penniless soldiers who would otherwise have torn down doors to get a place to sleep, it was common for landlords, when the day's business was done, to take everything of value out of their taprooms, put extra locks on the cellar doors, barricade the stairway leading to their living quarters, and leave the taproom open to such as might need a lodging.

It was in such a place that, after rushing through a long, flagged passage and hurling open a great oak door, we found ourselves. Two or three candles were guttering on the tables around the walls, there was a faint glow from the embers of the dying fire, and the room was empty.

Laying me rapidly yet gently on the bench nearest the fireplace, my rescuer, without stopping to draw breath, proceeded with works of a military nature.

First, he slipped out into the corridor again and extinguished the torch which had shown us the whereabouts of the inn; then, re-entering, he locked the oaken door. So far I could understand him; but now, selecting two of the heaviest tables, he placed them, on their sides, in the middle of the floor, one behind the other, but not in a line with it, and flanked this strange arrangement with four benches, likewise on their sides. All this he did in absolute silence, and with a speed of motion which no weight of furniture seemed to have power to retard.

Finally, he stepped over, unlocked the door again; then came and stood by the fireplace, pinching his chin between finger and thumb and considering his handiwork. Since in motion he was about as easy to observe as a flying swallow, I now obtained my first good impression of him. He was, to say no more, an extraordinary figure.

In the course of my campaigns, and later as an administrator of justice, I have set my eyes on many raffish characters; but I do not recall one more typical of the class known as soldiers of fortune than was my preserver at this moment. The first point about him was his build, which was, as it were, triangular—vastly broad shoulders tapering to a slim waist and long, slender legs, about the ankles of which—though he had no horse to my knowledge—flopped cavalry boots with enormous kidskin tops.

Out of these sodden monstrosities rose hose which had once been scarlet, but which by dint of patching and re-patching, had come to resemble a Joseph's coat. What like the doublet may have been, I can not tell; for its sleeves were covered in the folds of a bright yellow cloak, hanging low on the left side so that it could be wound about the arm for sword-and-dagger work; and the rest of it was hid by the breastplate to which I have before alluded—a most startling item, too, considered with the rest of the equipage, of the finest steel, inlaid with a forest of gold tracery, and matched in quality by the baldric which hung over one shoulder, supporting a rapier of formidable length.

As to the face above the breastplate—it was topped by a hat even worse than my own—I know not how to describe it; not especially handsome, assuredly not plain; lean, dark-skinned as any Tuscan's, but jeweled with the most startling pair of eyes I have ever seen. The man's hair was black, his eyebrows also, and his lashes, but his eyes were of a bright steel-blue, set wide apart and turning slightly down at the corners; and they seemed to have the faculty either of taking in every object of a large room simultaneously, or of focusing on a single thing until they had extracted from it its inmost secrets.

In their first capacity, they had been surveying the taproom; in their second, they now turned on me. And before I proceed, I would of my kindness warn the reader against any man he may meet who shall remind him of this description. There are fewer of them in the country now that the *condottiere* are dying out, but some still survive. And whatever their name or apparent race, it is to be noted that they are in fact Hibernians, or Irish. *Brawl not with them.*

"Though thou art ragged," said this scarecrow to me without preface, "I perceive thou art a gentleman. My name is

Arcangelo Kavanagh, and I am a gentleman too; a descendant, on the male side, of a king of Ireland; and on the female, a Sforza. I mention this because there was a captain of horse in Rome who mistook my lack of ducats for lack of breeding so far as to call me a beggar. He descended into hell."

At this moment, a certain faintness, born of hunger and a pain in the side which had attacked me since my fall, caused me to close my eyes.

Instantly, the ferocious figure before me changed character like a marionette. Arcangelo Kavanagh dropped on his knees beside me and raised my head in his arms.

"Nay, nay," he said, "thou art a tender flower, ods fish. I did not mean——"

The faintness passed, and I essayed to sit up. He helped me, with a face of the greatest sympathy. My lips were parched, and he saw it.

"If I had so much as a carlin in my purse," he began, "I would rouse this landlord and——"

He fretted with his feet and his eyes wandered to the door of the cellar.

"I think, if I took the embers of the fire and piled them——"

"Nay," said I, "let us waste no time. See, our footprints remain in the snow, and within a minute, our pursuers will be on us——"

"For whose benefit," he replied soothingly, "I have made the arrangements thou seest. There will be of them, I estimate, no more than five or six. They cannot rush us, because of the tables and benches I have laid out according to military science, and though thou hast no sword, I think we shall do well. I am not without skill in the rough-and-ready mode, and——"

"But," I broke in, "the arquebuses!"

He stared at me.

"Sir," I told him, "one of those conspirators was none other than Gianni Salvini, a lieutenant of the town-guard; which, as thou knowest, is of the party of the people and contrary to the duke."

"I know nothing of it," said Arcangelo, taking hold of his chin again. "Seeing that I am in Florence but a day——"

"Then I tell thee," I ended, "that if Ugo Ginori desires us slain, it will be in no attack of one man or two, but of fifty men, pikes, arquebuses, and two-handed swords, and——"

"Lamentable," said Arcangelo pensively.

At this moment, from the stone-flagged corridor, came a loud clash and jingle. Crowding in through the doorway, several armed men together; one had fallen.

"Nevertheless," said Arcangelo, sweeping out all the candles with a circle of his sword—which he had drawn so quickly that I did not see it leave its sheath, "they are here. Hear them bubble and squeak in the passage! They argue who shall go first. Canst thou stand?"

His hand reached out for mine in the darkness and he pulled me to my feet. For an instant we stood side by side, breathing heavily and listening to the murmurs of our enemies in the corridor.

"Take this," muttered the man at my side.

"But thyself?" I asked—for he had given me his sword; and dagger or pistol I knew he had none.

"I shall arm myself," came his voice from some distance ahead, accompanied by the scrape of some heavy wooden object on the floor. "Besides, I have this breastplate. Art thou ready?"

"For what?" I asked in a whisper.

He had dropped his voice as the sounds in the corridor drew closer and closer to the door. The mutterings and grunts were now just on the other side of the oak.

"To follow me," he whispered back. "Reach out and catch my cloak. I remember where I laid these barricades. Come quickly."

Guided by the tail of his sodden mantle, I stumbled across the room in his wake.

"When I shout, shout thou," he whispered, as suddenly a crack of light appeared around the door, "and use the sword as if it were thine own. Andrea Agnelli made it. Now——"

The crack of light widened to an inch—two inches—six inches; and now there appeared in the opening of the door, backed by the ruddy glow of torches, the anxious and timorous face of Gianni, peering into the pitch-dark room.

"There is no one here," said the man, quaveringly.

"Their tracks led hither, coward," roared the voice of the Scoronconcolo. "Throw wide the door and command them to surrender."

Knowing that the shiverer in the doorway would not obey, he himself stepped up through the ruck of town-guardsmen, flung the door open and shouted—

"In the name of——"

At which moment, Arcangelo Kavanagh gave a yell that shook the very building; and, holding the wooden bench he had picked up after the manner of a battering-ram, rushed straight forward into the pack of soldiery. My own yell, after his, was a poor affair, interrupted by a cough which seemed to shake me to pieces. But I did my best. And, after Arcangelo's ram, taking the Scoronconcolo in the midriff and hurling him back against his followers, had cleared the way, my sword did certain work. As the man in the yellow cloak drew back for another rush which should clear the way into the street, for instance, I nailed to the doorpost that wretch Gianni, who, with a dagger, purposed to stab Arcangelo in the neck.

But of the details of that fight, I remember very little, being then already half-unconscious, except that, by the force and surprize and the novelty of our assault, we had actually gained the snow outside when another patrol of the guard, attracted by the noise, or perhaps summoned by that infernal Gianni before he dared lead his own troop to attack, appeared in the mouth of the alleyway, fresh, unshaken, and with arquebuses leveled.

Against such odds, there was no question of fighting; nay, but that we were surrounded by the first patrol, one volley would have been the end of us then and there. And so, Arcangelo, knocking down two men with a sidewise sweep of his bench, and thus momentarily clearing a way of escape on the side opposite to the reinforcements, gasped the one word—

"Run!"

And, necessity overcoming the unwillingness of my limbs, we sped down the alleyway together.

It seems to me that we ran for hours. There was a feeling as of a band about my chest when we started; and by the time Arcangelo laid his arm on my shoulder and pulled me to a halt, it seemed that my lungs were bursting.

"By Peter, they have lost us," he gasped.

We had run into the tangle of little streets near the New Market, and I surmise that in the confusion our pursuers had mistaken the tracks of other late-farers for ours. We had had perhaps fifty yards start of them in the beginning, but we had lengthened it by cause of their heavy armament; and now, shouting and firing wildly, we could hear them going down another street parallel to ours. My head began to swim. I was terribly nauseated and the pain in my side seemed to grow and grow.

"Only for the time," I muttered. "They will catch us sooner or later. We cannot leave Florence, having no horses, and they will scour the city——"

"Tut-tut," said Arcangelo Kavanagh.

He loosed me and fumbled in his pocket. A dim light was coming from between the curtains of a house near us and I could see him; though he, like the rest of the world, appeared to be spinning around with increasing rapidity.

"There is always a way out, until death closes it," he said thoughtfully, drawing out a letter sealed with a heavy seal. "If we cannot escape, then must we fight our enemies openly. In any event, I wish to stay in Florence."

"How can we fight them openly?" I asked.

"Didst not say that the duke's guard continually did fight with these townsfolk?" asked Arcangelo.

And though I had not said it, true it was. And the duke encouraged them thereto, though publicly he would censure his guards most severely; a farce on the face of it, since none were admitted to the guard save young noblemen of sufficient family and wealth to be above punishment. None others could be relied upon in those times to guard the duke's person, save those who were attached to his cause by bonds of interest.

"Very well, then," said this ragged scarecrow, looking at front and back of his letter and replacing it in his pocket, "there is our salvation. I had not wished to do so, but necessity knows no table-manners."

He sniffed loudly, wiped his nose on the back of his hand, and patted me reassuringly on the shoulder, at the same time brandishing the heavily sealed letter in the air.

"Thou and I," he said, "will therefore join the Duke's guard!"

II

I OPENED my eyes on a scene which, considering the circumstances on which I had closed them, struck me as exceedingly strange; and lay looking at the same, my eyes half-opened for some minutes, while I tried to arrange in my mind some explanation of how this could have come about.

I remembered distinctly that when an overwhelming weakness and a great pain in my lungs had made me collapse in the snow, I had been homeless in a strange city, hunted by the officers of the law, and in company of a ragged madman who, having rendered himself liable to private assassination and to public hanging, was insisting upon going to the Palazzo Ricciardi in the dead of night to demand admission to the duke's guard.

This madman had kept me company, it seemed, throughout the long fever whose ache I could now feel in my bones. I had dreamed continually of asking him what he did in Florence—why, if he were not already in the duke's service, he had wanted to climb that drain-pipe up to Ugo Ginori's window—how, if he had only been in Florence one day, he had known of the conspiracy at all. To all of which questions, in my dream, he had given no answer but a mysterious smile.

And he was still with me now that I was not dreaming.

He was, in fact, sitting near the window of a long, pleasant room at one end of which I lay in bed. He had on the scarlet-and-gold striped hose of the duke's guard, a rich brocaded shirt, but no doublet; and, humming a tune, he was at present engaged in playing dentist to one of the most disreputable-appearing tomcats of my experience. The animal was lying on its back, protesting loudly, while Arcangelo Kavanagh with an earnest expression and a pair of barber's tweezers, probed carefully into its mouth. And opening my eyes wider, I perceived that this grimalkin was not alone in his glory. About the floor, in various attitudes of ease, lay a dozen other cats; tabbies, blacks, grays and others, differing in every respect save one—a common thinness of neck, baldness of fur and emaciation of body.

"No wonder thou howled," said Arcangelo, suddenly, with a rapid jerk of the wrist, drawing forth a tooth from his victim's jaw. "Observe it, Ser Gatto. What an abscess! Warm milk. H'm!"

It was on crossing to the table which stood on my side of the room, to pour out this delicacy, that he perceived that my eyes were open. Upon which, without a moment's hesitation, he dropped to his knees in the middle of the floor and recited two *paters* and an *ave;* and then, rising and accomplishing the distance between us with one and the same leap, he took both my hands and shook them violently.

"*Santa Maria!*" he shouted. "You are recovered! This is a great day! Boy, boy, I have hungered and thirsted after a sight of those eye-balls of yours. Welcome back to life! How do you find yourself? Is't not a lovely day?"

"I am a little weak," I told him—and in fact I could scarcely raise my head.

"Young man," said Arcangelo earnestly, wiping a tear out of the startling eyes to which I have previously alluded, "be not over-critical. Better this weakness than the kind of strength thou hast had these last two weeks. It did my heart good to see thee so well acquainted with the motions of mixed fighting, but it was tiring—very tiring. Three times a day was I forced to gather the surgeon, the landlord and the landlord's eldest son and draw them up in military formations to prevent thee from fighting thy way to the window, and thence jumping out. At this present time, I have bruises all over my ribs, and the landlord's nose resembleth a love-apple."

"Have I been here two weeks?" I asked.

"Considering that thou hadst a rib broken, a sword-hole over thy breast-bone, and a congestion of the lungs, it is not over-long," protested Arcangelo.

Then, seeing the cloud which passed over my face:

"But if thy care is for Madonna Allegra—all is well. Thy—er—delirium informed me of the state of affairs and I have arranged everything. If ever she loved thee—she may still be thine."

"Then she is not wed to—?" I began—I did not know the name of the tall villain.

"Nay," said Arcangelo, putting his hand on my forehead. "Calm thyself."

"What prevented?"

"Why," said Kavanagh soothingly, "in a great part, it was the imprisonment of thy rival, whose name, by the way, is Alberto della Maremme. There are no marriages in the Fortezza da Basso—in which single respect it resembles heaven."

"How came he there?" I demanded.

"I took him," replied my nurse. "*Vi et armis*, I conducted him thither and saw him comfortably locked in the north tower, where he now languishes, being a sad dog, and no company even for himself. Benedetto, thy head begins to heat. Lie down."

He pushed me irresistibly backward.

"Now I have begun, I must continue," he muttered, "or wilt turn thyself into a bonfire again. Fool! Why did I start? Know, then, that the whole tribe of thy Ginoris are at large, though thy fever-babblings have been enough to hang and bankrupt the whole of them seven times over. I am in favor with the duke. After I had presented my letter to the old bear that commands his guard—it came from certain high connections of mine in Rome—and so been admitted to the ranks, nothing would suit his Highness but he must question me in person; and so I went and sat by his bedside—he had been drinking the night before—and endured his ill-humored beginnings as well as I could.

"There was his boon companion also—a nasty sneering fellow named Lorenzo or Lorenzino de' Medici; some kind of left-handed cousin of the duke's forty times removed—a great talker. It was he that drove me to desperation.

" 'Thou hast been in Ferrara?' quotha. 'Then why didst thou leave?'

" 'Because I was banished,' said I.

" 'And wherefore?' says the duke.

" 'For pulling my captain's nose,' I told him.

" 'Perhaps,' sneers Lorenzino, 'that was also the end of thy service in Mantua—banishment?'

"He thought he had me there.

" 'It was,' says I.

" 'And thou hast been in Venice?' growls the duke.

" 'I am in exile therefrom at this moment,' said I.

" 'And from Rome too?' says Lorenzo.

" 'From Rome too,' I said, 'but I would not have thee judge too hardly in that case. I there slew a man, truly, but the provocation was great. He was a cousin of a nobleman, and he did continually ask me questions.'

"At this the duke laughed, though Lorenzo turned a fine purple.

" 'Dost tell me thou'rt banished from all those cities?' says Alessandro, rolling over on his paunch to survey me.

" 'And from others besides,' I answered—which is no more than the truth.

" 'Then Florence,' says he, 'is the only place thou canst lay thy head.'

" 'And even there,' says I, 'if it were known to the common people that I had served under Giovanni of the Black Bands, in the cavalry which nearly defeated the Emperor and prevented your Highness' accession, doubtless there would be trouble.'

"Mark my subtlety, Benedetto—if thou art not too weak. I appraised his drunken whimsy. Had I flattered and fawned, he would have had none of me. As it was, he laughed until the bed shook.

" 'Here is a notable cutthroat,' quotha.

"After which, blinking his eyes to see me clearly, he looked upon me with favor.

" 'I shall have use for thee—until thou art hanged. Tell old Marchesi thou wilt not mount guard. I will appoint thee my privy bravo. Thine orders shall come from me direct. Here is a rope for thee to do thy strangling with.'

"He handed me a silk cord torn off the bed-hangings and dissolved again into laughter. Since then, I have been able to do no wrong—which, considering that Lorenzo can do no wrong either, and that we hate each other cordially, has given his Grace more headaches than his wine of late. And I hold a general commission, under the ducal seal, to arrest whom I please, do what I please, and go wherever the fancy takes me. Here it is—look on it gratefully as the preserver of thy mistress from marriage without thy consent. 'The bearer acts under my orders. Splosh, a big seal—Alessandro.' Now, art thou satisfied?"

I was amazed past speech, but I nodded.

"Then hasten and recover," said Arcangelo, bending the gaze of those blue eyes on me piercingly, "for time passes, and I have much to do that I cannot do alone. I think I can trust thee; and if I can not, after these weeks of wet-nursing and fighting thee by turns, why then doubtless the Lord will strike thee dead before thou canst betray me."

"Betray thee?" I asked.

"Ay—betray me to hang out of the window of the Palazzo Vecchio," said Arcangelo, taking his chin between finger and thumb and smiling at me, "even as I could hang thy family-in-law-to-be if I opened my mouth."

"As what wouldst thou hang?" I demanded.

He shifted his pinch to his lower lip and, extending it an inch or so, surveyed me carefully.

"As a conspirator against the duke," he replied. Then flung out a hand. "Nay—nay. Do not think that I bite the hand which provides my silk shirts. I *was* a conspirator against the duke. I came to Florence to put matters in train for his deposition; and, but for the ill-luck of that brawl with the town-guard— Well, my desire to continue in this life forced me into his service, and my plotting is at an end until such times as I can get out of it. The trouble is that a dozen folks in Florence know both of my coming and of my purpose; while, having no very tender consciences, they do not understand my inaction. This will breed trouble—is so doing at these presents. Wherefore I would have thee eat this jelly and drink this wine, and, if meditate thou must, think of new modes of parrying a stab in the back. Hey, Girolamo! Girolamo!"

I heard hasty, heavy footsteps on the stairs, and the landlord entered—recognizable very easily by the damaged nose which Arcangelo had compared to a red fruit.

"The young gentleman is awake," said Kavanagh sternly, "and desires to regret that he crippled thee. For this he awards thee a gold crown, payable when he hath made his fortune. Now taste the jelly."

The fellow—a fat, good-humored shopkeeper with a ready smile, thanked me profusely for my generosity. And I may say that I have since rewarded him, not with one gold crown, but with the stewardship of the villa at Fiesole; from which he doubtless extracted many ducats in addition to his salary.

"Now the wine," ordered Arcangelo, pouring out a thimbleful in the bottom of a glass. "Let not this alarm thee, Benedetto. I do not think the folk I mentioned are yet at the point of poisoning, but— Why dost thou not taste the wine, fellow?"

The rogue smiled at him.

"May I tell your lordship," he asked, "that there is scarce enough there to slay me, even if the wine be poisoned? I desire to be diligent in my office."

Arcangelo poured out another inch. The rascal swallowed it without the slightest hesitation.

"In return for which debauch," said my nurse, putting down the bottle, "I will ask thee only this—that if thou feel agonies coming on, thou wilt lie on thy floor. The drumming of thy heels in the death-struggle will then apprise me of thy condition without delay or the climbing of stairs. *Avanti!*"

"Certainly—certainly," said Girolamo, backing to the door. "I trust the young gentleman——"

"Well, I do not trust thee," shouted Arcangelo. "Hence, moon-face!"

Then he poured out wine for me, and placed a portion of jelly on a plate.

"I am of a peaceful temper," he sighed, placing the collation under my nose and preparing to feed me with a spoon. "But what the purse lacks of impressiveness, the manner must supply. I have swash-buckled my way through life for twenty-five years."

"I had thought thee older," I said, opening my mouth for the spoon.

"Chew vigorously," said Arcangelo Kavanagh, "and leave future thinking to thy betters. Now some wine."

And so—in addition to coddling and continually increasing his collection of stray cats, which finally overran the whole house—did he nurse me during the ten days that followed. So was I bled and leeched at the hands of Signor Giacomo da Carpi, the duke's own surgeon, that Arcangelo, rushing into the apartment late one December night of wind and pouring rain, found me up, dressed in the suit of civilian clothes he had purchased for me, suppling my wrist with practise of certain thrusts and parries of my father's; my weapon mine own sword, which this extraordinary man had bought back from the pawnbroker and delivered to me the day after my recovery.

THE moment he entered at the door, his hat and cloak running water, two long, drenched locks of hair plastered wetly across his forehead, I perceived something was wrong, even as did the four or five cats who had risen and rushed forward to rub against his legs. Arcangelo's face showed no signs of terror or anxiety, but it was a little paler than usual in the candlelight. His long, lean jaw seemed to stick forward a trifle further than usual and his blue eyes appeared larger and of a colder color.

"Benedetto," he said, without preface, "I am in danger of my life. The time has come. Art thou well enough to come with me?"

For answer, I put the sword back into its baldric and reached for my cloak.

"First put on this," said Arcangelo, tearing open a chest and pulling forth a package wrapped in leather.

He cut the thongs binding it with his dagger and threw the contents toward me. It was a shirt of the finest chain mail.

"Over thy clothes," he snapped, throwing aside his cloak to assist me, so that I saw he was wearing the breastplate I remembered at our first meeting. "It was made for me, and will not fit thee otherwise—besides, this is most open business. Pull the cloak up around thy throat and breathe sparingly of the night air. Canst sit a horse?"

"Do we ride?" I gasped, as he blew out the candles he could reach and, as if it were a commonplace, tilted the table so that the others fell off to the floor, and there expired. In everything he did, this same quality predominated—of speed, halting not for a moment's consideration of ways and means; action directed by instinct, it seemed, into the shortest channel. It was the speed which a swordsman develops by years of practise; extended, in this man's case, even to such matters as the extinguishing of candles.

So we were half-way down the stairs before he answered me.

"Not unless we must," he said, "but if we must, the ride will be a long one—and perhaps with cavalry behind. Walk slowly until thou hast breathed thyself."

With which admonition, he pulled back the bolts of the street door, which he must have fastened, against all custom, when he came in—and we stepped out into the wild blackness of the night.

I knew from what Arcangelo had told me that our lodging was somewhere to the north of the river, near the duke's palace; and now we turned with the wind at our backs and walked rapidly south. It was no palace business, then. We were heading for the Arno bridges, and the heart of the city, where, among others, lived the Ginori. I opened my mouth to ask my guide—he seemed quite indifferent to the utter darkness—whether that conspiracy furnished our business; the cold wind made me cough and Arcangelo rebuked me.

"No talk," he snapped. "Thou shalt see all soon enough. Only hasten!"

Nothing, however, could prevent my thinking, and I thought furiously. Association with this man was growing to be a thick and murky affair indeed. Already, to my knowledge, he was embroiled with the Ginori, the people's party, and Lorenzo de' Medici, the duke's cousin and favorite. Then again, there was this half-disclosed connivance of his own at a plot against Alessandro, which jumped, in my mind, together with his mention of that dead hero, Giovanni of the Black Bands. Giovanni, whom my father had pointed out to me as the greatest captain of horse in the world, had been a Medici of the younger line. Alessandro was of the elder line, but his scutcheon bore a bar sinister.

There were those who had said that legitimacy should compensate for juniority, and Giovanni of the Black Bands be duke. Besides, he had been a man, while the world knew Alessandro to be no more than a simpering wine-tun. Now Giovanni was beyond dukedoms, but he had left a son, they said—his and Maria Salviati's. None knew where he was—Alessandro's poisoners and assassins had not been able to find him—but in Florence it was whispered that he was full seventeen years of age, and much on the pattern of his father. Now, if this mad Irishman at my side had served under Giovanni—

"Around this corner," said Arcangelo, pulling my wrist violently, "and have thy dagger ready."

We stopped at the door of a mean dwelling, apparently deserted, and my companion, raising his poniard-hilt, struck the panels three soft blows which nevertheless echoed dismally in the unfurnished room beyond.

"Speak!" said a voice from within.

"Governo!" answered Arcangelo softly. It was the name of the place where Giovanni of the Black Bands had been slain!

There was the grind of a bolt drawn; the door opened and we entered. The door closed behind us, the bolt ground back into its socket and, like a continuance of its rusty complaint, a wheezy, harsh old voice spoke close to my ear.

"You did well to come, Ser Arcangelo," it grated. "Very well indeed—very well. The Black Eight has been growing impatient. It awaits you in council."

"Up-stairs?" asked Kavanagh quietly.

"Do moles fly?" asked the unseen gatekeeper with a ravenlike chuckle. "No, in the cellar."

Arcangelo took me by the elbow and urged me forward. A moment later, my hand encountered a newel-post, greasy with the touch of a thousand artisans; then my foot a sagging stair; and so, side by side, we descended into a pit from which rose, strangely mingled, the dank, cold smell of imprisoned earth and the warm odor of oil-lamps and brazier of charcoal. Until we reached the foot of the stairway, there was, furthermore, a rumble of low-pitched voices in consultation, which, as we turned the corner into the light and warmth of the cellar, ceased suddenly.

The Black Eight received us in ominous silence.

The French, the Spaniards and the Siennese, if questioned, will probably assure an inquirer that Benedetto degli Rozzi is known to be far from a timid man; yet on my side, I will avouch that at this moment, though I had just come in from an icy blast to stand near a brazier, I felt the hair of my scalp struggling to rise under my hat. I had come forth with Arcangelo, estimating the adventure as no more than perhaps a fight; and if I had speculated, as we came along, concerning his connection with high treasonable affairs of State, it had been speculation and no more. Now, in a flash, a few seconds only after I had conceived the idea of such an *imbroglio*, behold the remote fear realized. For at the first glimpse of this grim council, I knew that we were intermixed with a plot far more fatal than that of Ugo Ginori. The Black Eight, imitating, it was obvious, the Council of Eight which had governed the city before Alessandro became tyrant, sat side by side behind a long trestle table covered in red cloth.

In fact, just as it had been with the city's Eight, there were nine men at the board—the president sitting, like the gonfalonier in the courts of justice, in a chair a little higher than the four to each side of him. All were masked—not only as to the face, but with black hoods which covered their entire heads and continued down over the shoulders to the edge of the table. Even their hands, tucked into the wide sleeves of these terrifying disguises, were invisible. The only sign of life in the shrouded figures as, immobile, they surveyed Arcangelo and myself, was the glitter of their fire-lit eyes through the visors of their cowls.

And, to add the final touch of certainty to my opinion concerning their purpose—behind the chair of the president stood a man-at-arms, shrouded like the rest—who held aloft on a spear this Black Gonfalonier's pennant of office. It was a sable banner such as was carried by the free troops of Giovanni de' Medici!

"You are late," said the president, in a dead, flat voice like the pronouncement of Fate.

"For which," said Arcangelo easily, "I have apologized already. I trust it may not be necessary to repeat——"

"The council has considered your excuse," said the president, "and finds it empty. You told our messenger that you were forced into the duke's service by the necessity of saving your life from the town-guard. This matter should have been brought to the Eight."

"Save only that, having as yet received no messages promising me death if I did not come to this house, bringing with me this young fellow who has nothing to do with the matter—I did not know where the Eight was to be found," said Arcangelo.

"Hadst no instructions from Rome, fellow?" snapped the president.

"I had the letter which was to gain me admission to the duke's guard, in which position I could with facility murder him," snapped Arcangelo in return. "Aside from that sweet instruction, nothing, save advice to watch Ugo Ginori, reported to be plotting against the duke on his own account——"

"Neither of which orders thou obeyed?" growled one of the other figures at the board.

"The first of which I was treating with the scorn it deserved, and the second of which I was doing, when there arose this brawl with the town-guard which forced me to use the letter of introduction—though not to sink into treachery, my masters. I am somewhat surprized at all this, *signors*. I joined your fair company thinking to gain the benefit of your concerted strength. I was impressed by the influence of the council at Rome, which, hearing that I was captain of the Black Bands since Giovanni's death, got me released from jail—where I had languished six months for the mere slaying of a man who had insulted me.

"It would have been better had they got me out sooner, for then I should still be captain of the Bands; but I *was* impressed. Now I find that those of you in one city are most ignorant of the doings of those in another, and generally confusion is twice confounded. As if ye none of you worked under one leader. As if Cosimo, son of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, whom ye call your rightful duke, were either dead—or ye did not know where to find him."

There was a momentary silence, and it seemed to me that a shiver ran through the Eight; as if those last words had struck home. The president, turning his head slightly aside, appeared to wait for advice from others of the council. Perhaps some whisper reached him; I could not tell.

Finally, he leaned forward across the table on his elbows and spoke again in that flat voice which seemed to me unnatural for any living man. Perhaps, I thought, it was disguised. If these members of council hid every other identifying trace from each other, why should they leave unchanged such a revealing factor as the voice?

"That aside, there remains," said the president, though it was not aside in his mind, as I could tell, "thy refusal to do the work for which thou hast accepted pay, because thou art——"

"One moment," said Arcangelo, stepping up to the table, "one moment, Ser Black Gonfalonier. Thou sayest I have accepted pay. Therefore I tell thee I have not. And if thou repliest, I have, I will take thy words, by Peter, and ram——"

"Then why art thou with us?" asked the flat voice.

"I am here because, so far from being a hired assassin, I am a gentleman, and the descendant of a king of Ireland," roared Ancangelo. "Therefore, when a brother in arms commends his child to my care with his dying breath, I undertake the charge. It was in my arms that Giovanni de' Medici died at Governo; and in dying, he opened to me this matter of tyrants and rightful successions. And I promised that so far as my sword could aid his son Cosimo to the place that was his by right, I would do it."

"Thou alone?" said the flat voice. Some other of the council snickered.

"Yes, I alone—and I would I had not sought aid!" said Arcangelo. "For it is to be noted, *messers*, that my friend whom *ye* claim as your prophet, said naught to me of this business of cellars and black nightweeds——"

"Silence!" said the flat voice.

"—nor yet," went on Kavanagh, "of such business as the betrayal of one's master—once one had been forced to take service——"

"Silence!" said the voice again, rising in force.

"—nor yet," said Arcangelo, "of dealings with Black Eights who could drag into peril of their necks, young fellows with no knowledge of the business in hand."

"Silence!" shouted the Black Gonfalonier for the third time.

The shrouded sentinel with the spear, at some sign unseen to us, started around the table to enforce the order. In an instant, Arcangelo's sword was out.

"One more step," he grated, "and by Peter, I will prove that I am not in thy pay, Ser Bogey. Move not, any one. I have a long leap and a long reach, and my arm makes little of chain-mail. Therefore be quiet and listen to me; and if any one of you has a fire-pistol about him, let him beware! There are five men of the duke's guard in the street and at one bang they break down the door. So!"

"Thou canst betray us, then, if not the duke?" hissed the president, half-rising.

"I betray no one," said Arcangelo. "The five know not why they are here. I ordered them to come. They obeyed. My orders need no explanation when they are given in the name of Duke Alessandro. Nor do my actions in the name of Duke Cosimo, whose father appointed me his guardian, and not you, fellows. Now, there was a certain threat of death—to me and to this young man. Who executes the same?"

No one moved.

"The young man is the love of Allegra Ginori," said the flat voice of the president.

I started.

"As the Duke is likewise," he went on.

Arcangelo's fingers closed over my elbow-joint with a crushing force.

"We had planned somewhat for the young man's advantage and our own," the voice continued levelly, "the salvation of the wench for him and—somewhat else for our own account."

The blood rushed to my head.

"I——"

Again Arcangelo's fingers closed on my elbow.

"Is that the whole business of the council?" he asked. "This suborning of my honor, and this boy's love, to murder?"

The president's arms were fumbling in the sleeves of his robe. The motion was very slight, but since that grip on my elbow I was intent for trifles.

"That is all, save—" he began.

At that instant, the grip on my elbow changed to a compelling thrust. Before I knew what was to happen, I had been swung around until I faced the dark opening of the stairway. Then, like a battering ram, Arcangelo's great hand struck my back, hurling me bodily at the steps, up the first half-dozen of which I sprawled and scrambled.

Something glowing and scattering a stream of sparks flashed over my head. Arcangelo had snatched up the brazier of charcoal to light our way and was fleeing with it, yelling to me to come quickly. It was just as he leaped over my body, and I began to stumble frenziedly after him, that from the room below came a dull roar as the pocket firelock the president had drawn—a —— invention, then just new from the brain of the devil—sent forth a bullet which thudded into the lintel. I needed not that to spur me, though I doubt not it was of assistance.

With another scramble on all fours up those accursed greasy stairs, I reached Arcangelo's hand, which lifted me from my feet and landed me at his side. In the glow of the brazier, which he swung like a censer by its handle, we could see, between us and the door, the glitter of armor. Just as I reached his side, the two men who wore it rushed at us.

At the same moment we attacked them. One sent a sword-thrust over my shoulder as I bent. I caught him by the waist with my left arm and with my right drove my dagger upward where the plate ceased, just above his thigh. The other, seeing that Arcangelo held his sword in his left hand, his right holding the firepot, thrust randomwise at him. But before his point could touch, the brazier of charcoal swung in a vast circle, smote him full in the face. He screamed and fell backward amid a shower of embers. I saw his face and gasped. It was the Scoronconcolo!

"Belike that will burn the house," said Arcangelo, breathlessly.

Below, the Black Eight was shouting and stumbling on the stairs. We rushed to the door. It was bolted, and if the aged doorkeeper was there, we saw naught of him. The top bolt Arcangelo forced back—still the door would not open. From the stairs came a babble of voices.

"They are at the door—shoot, 'a God's name—he had no guard outside—he lied—kill them—let me pass, fool. —— to traitors——"

The floor on which lay the two men we had placed out of the fight was beginning to flicker under the charcoal embers. In this light, I could perceive Arcangelo wrestling, on his knees, with a bolt at the foot of the door. Also, above the head of the stairway, I perceived the form of one of the black-shrouded Eight, another fire-lock leveled. Whoever, these days, may say that shot and powder are quicker and surer than steel, that man is not among them. My sword was through his throat before ever he could fire, and he fell backward without a sound on his companions below.

"Come!" shouted Arcangelo, suddenly.

* * *

A BLAST of cold air rushed in, fanning the flames on the floor to spurts of fury. I gathered high my cloak, that it might not catch fire, and with blood dripping from sword and dagger, my brow covered with a sweat, which dripped continually into my eyes, I rushed out of the open door.

"Where is thy guard?" I gasped to Arcangelo, keeping up with him as, like some lithe wild animal, he ran, sword still in hand, down the street toward the Arno.

"I never had one," he answered grimly. "Run, little brother, for thy life. 'A God's name, enemies cluster around me like flies about honey— Who will look after my cats?"

His cats—now! But it meant that we were leaving Florence, even as he had foretold.

A thousand questions jostled each other in my mind as we rushed down a steep street, across the Ponte Vecchio, and up to an inn on the southern side of the river, but I had not breath to spare wherewith to express them.

"There should be two horses waiting for us here," he gasped, turning up the narrow way that led to the stable in the rear of the house. "The ostler served under me once——"

A lantern gleamed in the murk ahead, lighting the face of a simple fellow, roused from sleep, with straw still in his hair, his brow contracted with anxiety over these matters so far above his comprehension.

"The horses are ready, Signor Captain," he stammered.

They were there in the darkness behind him, clothed but ready. Arcangelo flung himself at one. The ostler, setting down the lantern, and seeming to catch the madness of speed from his old commander, tore at the buckles of the other's blanket.

"These are thine own horses, thou said?" gasped Arcangelo. "Cheap thou got 'em, too, I'll be bound. Nevertheless, I take them, saddles and all, at thine own valuation. Dost trust me?"

"Always," said the man, "always, Signor Captain Arcangelo. Good luck. The Virgin protect thee. God strike your grace's enemies."

"Beware thy neck—our enemies are powerful," chuckled Arcangelo, swinging to the saddle. "Help the young gentleman mount—he hath been sick of late. So! *A rivederci*, Antonio!"

"The saints defend—" began the stableman.

And then, regardless of the noise we made, we clattered full gallop down the alleyway, out into the street, and away toward the Gate of San Pier Gattolini.

"The gates are closed," I cried, as we came in sight of the bulk of the southern wall, at whose foot there moved, like sluggish fireflies, the lanterns of the changing guard.

" 'The bearer acts by my orders,' " laughed Arcangelo. "Never forget that commission, little one—it is going to save thy life."

"Why do not we then go back to the duke's palace?" I asked, for the sweat had chilled on my brow and I was beginning to shiver. I had just risen, remember, from a bed of sickness, and this ride to Sienna or Lucca or Rome—

"At the duke's palace, within half an hour of our entrance," said my companion, "I should be swinging out of one window by my neck, while thou danced on nothing under the next. Didst see the president of yon Black Eight—didst hear his voice?"

"I thought it disguised," I chattered. An ague had taken possession of me.

"Ah-ha!" said Arcangelo. "But didst hear me interrupt him until from force of anger, he raised it? *Basta!* Then we heard his true tones and knew him!"

A hundred yards ahead the lanterns flickered hurriedly and I saw two pikes cross themselves in our way.

"On his Highness' service!" shouted Arcangelo, in a voice to wake the dead. "Way for the duke's messenger! Way for the duke's post!"

An officer ran up to the side of the pikemen. We pulled our horses to their haunches, and Arcangelo handed him the note under the duke's seal. He scrutinized it by the light of his watch-lantern, and handed it back, yelling for the gates to be opened.

"A bad night," he muttered, settling his chin into his cloak.

"A bad night for hanging." agreed Arcangelo, in a tone as light as a feather of fine steel.

The watch-officer laughed.

"All nights are bad for that," he chuckled. "God save us all from sin. Ho, abominations, sons of dogs, back with the gate! Is the duke to wait?"

"Very proper zeal," said Arcangelo, as the mighty obstacle swung on its hinges.

The officer stamped his feet.

"I had thought I knew all his Grace's guardsmen—" he began.

"I am new, and the duke's personal attendant," said my companion, gathering the reins. "Thou wilt know of me presently. Good night!"

"Good night!" shouted the officer.

We thundered through the gate, past a host of ghostly wayfarers who, arriving after sundown, were perforce seeking as dry beds as they could under the shelter of the outer walls; and so out on the pitchy main road. Here the wind was more bitter cold than ever and the rain drove into our faces like leaden shot.

"He will hear of us ere another half-hour —and in burning words," said Arcangelo. "I wonder has that rogue Girolamo a tender heart!"

"He did not poison us," said I.

"Ah—that is different," said Kavanagh. "Perhaps none hired him; besides, there are many who will pity a man, but kill a cat. They think God's creation is half-sacred and half-otherwise. Now I——"

The thought that necessity had caused him to disfigure a man within the quarter-hour, halted him. And so at last I could speak.

"Arcangelo," I said, "I have news for thee. The man thou knocked down with the brazier as we escaped, though he now seems to have changed masters, was present at the plottings of Ugo Ginori when I looked through the window that night."

Kavanagh whistled through his teeth, then laughed.

"Plot and interplot most ingeniously interwoven," he said.

"Who," I demanded, "was the Black Gonfalonier?"

Arcangelo finished his chuckle.

"Why, strange as it may seem to thee," he answered, slowly, "and strange as it would be in any place other than this —— Florence, he was Lorenzo de' Medici, the duke's friend."

III

THERE was so utterly nothing to say to this that, though young and much addicted to useless talk, I gasped and rode on in silence, leaving the next speech to my companion who, however, seemed indisposed to develop this astounding theme, and merely resumed his whistling. He did not, in fact, speak again until we must have traveled full ten miles south, and then he changed the subject to one I had been trying to avoid even in my thoughts ever since he had told me back in the city that he needed my services in a business that might mean exile.

There was a fork in the road. We took the left branch, which struck away between fields and soon became little more than a track distinguished from the surrounding plowed land only by its greater muddiness. It was as we floundered through this—floundered, however, in a manner to indicate that Arcangelo was familiar with the country and perfectly knew his way—that he said suddenly—

"As to thy mistress, have no fear."

I said nothing, but merely set my teeth in my lip as the animal under me slipped on a stone and almost went down.

"It is not far now—I would have thy mind at rest, Benedetto, because—I have certain particular business for thee. Thou art in this affair on my account, though, if thou knew all, wouldst be with me on thine own; and I would not have thee think I would take away protection from a woman who needed the same. Allegra Ginori needs none."

"With the duke in—in love with her, as yon Black Gonfalonier hinted?" I was forced to say.

Some distance ahead through the murk I could dimly see the lights of a house.

"There are two sides to every tale," said Arcangelo grimly, "and the true side of this one is other than Lorenzo hinted. The duke thinks he hunts the girl. Benedetto, it is the other way about. No matter how I know—this is the case. One plan of Ugo Ginori's to make use of his niece failed with my arrest of Alberto della Maremme, who was to have been the bridegroom; he has made another, incomparably deadlier than the first. The duke is wed to the daughter of the Emperor Charles, fear of whom alone keeps the Florentines from kicking Alessandro off his throne tomorrow. The bride has already complained to her father that the duke neglects her. Charles is a man of high temper and higher pride; he is chafing at this insult to his daughter. Now, let Alessandro make one indiscretion concerning which there can be proof—Ah ha!——"

"Oh, God!" I groaned.

Arcangelo put his hand on my arm.

"Boy," he said, "I am with thee in that, but what couldst thou do, in Florence? Only hang, as I say. While between thy Allegra and actual harm, so long as old Ugo remains in Florence—and he has wealth enough to buy the city—are all the daggers of Filippo Strozzi's men. Once the duke in fact got the girl, the Emperor would hold the Ginori equally guilty in the damage to him."

The slush under our horse's feet gave place to flagstones, and the lights of a house—a long, low, ramshackle place, a *posada* for herdsmen—shone on us. There was the sound of the unlocking of a door.

"So long as Ugo Ginori remains in Florence," I said, "yes. But if the duke sweep him out of the way—what then?"

Arcangelo pulled his horse to a halt.

"Then," he said quietly, "I will return to Florence. Look at me. I will return. Art thou satisfied?"

I turned my eyes on him as he sat there motionless, his cloak pulled up about his throat, his hat slouched forward over those remarkable eyes, which seemed to shine even in the darkness. He seemed taller than was his wont, and from under the shadow of the hat jutted into the dim yellow light from the windows the chin of his long, lean jaw. A shiver, born of something quite other than the cold, ran through me.

"I am satisfied," I told him, as a man ran up to take our horses.

"Then be careful thy legs do not betray thee when thou dismount," said Arcangelo. "So! Bear up! If Girolamo has turned so much as one of those cats out into this night, I will carve him into dinners for the survivors. Where is the master?"

"In the taproom," said the ostler.

"Then to the taproom," said Arcangelo, taking my arm, "without fanfare of trumpets or other vain ceremony, we will introduce ourselves. Which we could not do, Benedetto *mio*, if every one had his own. Wouldst have to bend those stiff knees, boy, or have them poked from under thee by some fellow with a halbert. Therefore let us be thankful that rogues——"

We were at the door, and my companion's hand was on the latch.

"Who is this master?" I whispered.

"Cosimo, son of Giovanni de' Medici, and rightful duke of Florence," whispered back Arcangelo. "But be not afraid— Good evening!"

HE FLUNG open the door, we stepped within, and as he spoke the last words he bowed very low, hat plume sweeping the dusty floor, before a slim youth in black who had apparently been pacing up and down that ill-lighted room, trying to read a book as he paced. The cast of his fine-cut, dark features told clearly enough that patience was not one of his natural gifts, and a frown between his brows announced that what patience he had had been tried to the uttermost.

This, then, was Cosimo, the head of the younger line of the family that had ruled Florence, in fact if not in name, for two hundred years. I tried to find some similarity between his features and those of Alessandro, whose portraits, adorned with adulatory legends, I had seen as often as I had failed to see the duke. But there was none, or it was entirely overlaid. The last of the elder line was a bloated, small-eyed beast with a low forehead and lips which even his painters could not make unlike a negro's. This boy was clearly the son of a soldier, of clean life, and a gentleman in his own right.

"My young friend would bow also," said Arcangelo's voice from somewhere about the level of my hips, "but a ride in your Highness' service has frozen him stiff. Therefore I remain bowed for twice the ordinary period."

The young man's frown broke into a smile.

"Straighten thyself, cousin," he said. "Come sit at this table and speak quickly. I can not stay here over five minutes longer. I must be in Venice tomorrow. I had much to say to thee, Arcangelo."

"I also to thee," said my companion, "and I should have started earlier—was starting this afternoon at three—though I could not then have joined thee, being in other service—when I chanced to put a hand in my pocket and draw forth a letter signed by thee."

"By me?" snapped Cosimo, the frown reappearing.

"Or in thy name," said Arcangelo, drawing forth a scrap of paper and laying it on the table, "commanding me, as appears, to go to a certain address on thy business. Having only yesterday, however, seen thee in person—by the way, I can not agree with thy contention that thou art safer under the duke's nose, in Florence, than elsewhere——"

"That is my business," said the young man. "However, knowing this a forgery, thou didst not go?"

"Nay," said Arcangelo, putting his elbows on the table. "Quite otherwise. I did go. For as I told thee, after the death of thy father, whom God accept, when I was seeking thee, I found in Rome, as thou knowest, certain fat tradesmen acting in thy name—without, as thou hast since told me, thy authority. So, coming to Florence by orders of these flesh-pots, I find another body of similar louts, acting similarly, but with even more presumption. So, taking with me this young fellow, I set forth to chasten them."

The young man struck the table a sharp blow with his knuckles.

"Better have found out who they were, and what," he said impatiently.

"What they *were* my reason had told me already," said Arcangelo easily. "They are wine-sellers and wool-merchants and money-lenders, trying to extract gold from men's desire for peace and freedom. Save only one, whose plot is deeper than that—so deep that I can not fathom it. That being the case, I ascertained, instead, his name."

"And it was—?" demanded Cosimo.

"Lorenzino de' Medici," said my companion.

Now, that name had startled me enough when I heard it, but I can not describe its effect upon Cosimo. His lips became white, his eyes dilated while their pupils contracted to nothings. A shaking like the quiver of a sword-blade ran through him and, as if moved by a will not his own, he half-rose from the table.

"——'s death!" he whispered. "Again! Again!"

It was Arcangelo's turn to rap the table.

"Time flies," he said sharply, "and since your Highness calls me cousin—though 'tis only by marriage—I tell your Highness that this is no time for postures. Whatever Lorenzo's game, he knows of my admixture with your affairs. Moreover, certain friends of his lie dead. There may be cavalry after us by now—though, unless you fixed this rendezvous for them too, strike me if I think they will find us."

Cosimo sat. The fury of emotion had passed out of him, and now he clasped his hands, and laid his forehead against them. The book he had been reading lay between his elbows, its back toward me. It was "The Prince," by one Niccolo Macchiavelli.

"I say—" began Arcangelo.

"Let me think," Cosimo answered.

"There is also," the youth said, after some minutes, as if to himself, "this matter of Allegra Ginori. If, as thou sayest, Alessandro is to be ruined through her means, the emperor will hate all our family, myself as well. That means that either Strozzi will take the city and Ginori and his tradesmen really rule, or that it will be a republic again, and an easy prey for whoever strikes at it."

He sat in silence again; then lowered his hands suddenly.

"Arcangelo," he said, in the voice of a man who has made up his mind. "The time for action approaches. I know not what Lorenzo is doing—his game is too deep for me also—but whatever it is, the catastrophe is at hand. When I went to sound out Filippo Strozzi in Venice, Lorenzo was there as peace-pleader from Alessandro. The failure of my negotiations was due to his arguments. Now he appears as *my* deputy, plotting against the duke. Moreover, he has been in Rome, closeted with the Pope, who desired to supplant Allessandro with that other bastard, Ippolito, and whose present plans God alone knows. Lorenzo is bargaining with all the sides at once. A man so entangled can not long keep his feet and when he falls, spilling the matter of all these pretty plots, there will be a plain scramble for Florence. We must be ready to scramble with the rest."

He rose suddenly and snatched up his black cloak and hat.

"If this is thy seventeenth year, God preserve thine enemies from thy thirtieth," muttered Arcangelo. "Where away?"

"Where are my father's troops—the Black Bands?" demanded Cosimo, laying one hand flat on the table.

Arcangelo shook his head.

"God alone—" he began.

"Tell me," said Cosimo, "wert thou not with my father when he selected for them hiding-places, where they could rest between raids? Are they not to be found, belike, in one of those?"

Arcangelo laughed.

"My dear," he said, "we selected altogether, it might be, fifty such places, scattered over two hundred miles of country. It would take months to search them without a clue."

"They can be no two hundred miles away," said Cosimo, "since Ugo Ginori holds them ready, thou sayest, for a quick assault upon the city. There cannot be more than a half-dozen such places near enough."

He swept on his hat and wrapped his cloak around him.

"What is thine intention, 'a God's name?" asked Arcangelo.

"To ride with thee and search them all," answered Cosimo.

"And then?"

"To call upon them to rise and hang Battista and follow me," said the boy. "Arcangelo, I know the Bands are mercenaries, yet I do not believe they will balance a few paltry crowns of pay against the service of my father's son."

Arcangelo shrugged his shoulders, and took his chin between finger and thumb. Then, he rose stiffly to his feet and sighed.

"This is madness," he complained; "ods nig and nog, what a night! What of this young friend of mine? Does he chase wild geese with us?"

Cosimo considered me for a moment, his eyes piercing, his brows contracted.

"Landlord!" he shouted.

There was a sound as if some one had dropped all the metal utensils of the house at one time, and the landlord appeared.

"Bring a bottle of *aqua vitæ*," ordered Cosimo. "Enough to thaw this gentleman's limbs. After he has drunk, let him sleep for one hour. No more—no less. Begone. If you are willing, sir—" this to me—"I need a small service. I was to have visited a certain nobleman at his house tonight. His name is Carcano—Jesu Maria Carcano da Santezza, and his house is on the road to Ravenna. For the rest, ask by the wayside. Give him this ring, and say that he shall hear from me again—that I am gone to—to Rome."

The landlord reappeared with the *aqua vitæ* and a horn cup.

"Horses," said Cosimo. "Quickly."

Very evidently, from his manner, this fellow had no suspicion of the young man's rank or birth; more evidently still, he knew him as one accustomed to instant obedience. It seemed scarcely a minute—Arcangelo had had no more time than to pat me on one aching shoulder and reiterate his promise that Allegra should be safe—until we heard the rattle of hooves on the flagstones, and Cosimo, trembling with impatience, started for the door.

"Good night!" he snapped at me. "Come Arcangelo!"

My friend waved his hand to me, swept on his broad hat, pulled up the neck of his cloak again, and followed out into the darkness.

I, STRIVING to treat this appalling complication, in which I now found myself alone, with the calm that distinguished Arcangelo, poured myself out a jorum of liquor and stared through half-closed eyes at the fire.

However, though at first it was an effort to relax my tense muscles and thus appear unconcerned, Nature came to agree with me, and I relaxed in earnest. After a few moments, I reached for the cup, to add the warmth of the drink to the glow the fire was already sending through my legs and feet. It was an inch beyond my finger-tips, and I thought I would reach for it again—later——

The next thing I knew was that the door of the room in which I sat, dead asleep, sprawling half out of the chair—was flung crashing open. My opening eyes beheld first the striped doublet of the host—doubtless on his way to give me the alarm—disappearing again through his kitchen door.

Then suddenly, I saw two men in the uniform Arcangelo had worn, rushing toward me—one with a drawn sword, the other with a rope in his hands. I reached for the hilt of my own sword, but they were on me. The sword menaced my throat; the second guard threw himself bodily upon me, bearing me backward amid the ruins of the chair. I fumbled for my dagger, but a powerful hand closed on my wrist and held it. Then my head was lifted by the hair, and dashed as hard as could be against the thick oak leg of the table.

For the time it took them to bind me hand and foot, with a noose running up from my wrists to my neck, I was unconscious; then I came to myself enough to see that the first two men had been joined by four other guards, and two men in rich clothing. One of these latter, who stood staring down at me with one blubbery lip outthrust, was the duke. The other, in red velvet and gold—

"Shall we have him killed now, Lorenzo?" asked the fat brute.

"There is much to be said for that course," answered the taller, thinner man, "yet—assuredly he knows somewhat of interest—of value, it may be."

"I would have given a thousand ducats to have the other one," snarled Alessandro.

"And wouldst have had him if thou could have kept thy eyes off that cottager's wench," said Lorenzo.

Alessandro darted at him one glance of anger, but said nothing in reply, which startled me with the realization of the power exercised by this nobody over this unworthy duke.

"Well, this one shall do his best," Alessandro growled. "The rack shall see to that. And he has long, slim fingers for the thumbscrews. Moreover, he lifted his eyes to Allegra. I thirst to see him under the hot pincers. Put him on a horse. Put him on a horse, curse you, and get him to the Fortezza. I'll make him scream!"

Rough hands took me under the armpits; others grabbed my feet; I was lifted, carried out, tied roughly on a horse before one of the guard; and so, while Cosimo and Arcangelo rode unknowingly forth on their search, I started back to Florence and the duke's torture-chamber.

TO STATE a plain matter plainly—for two weeks and four days thereafter I lay helpless and terrified in a dungeon of the Fortezza da Basso; trembling each morning at the thought of the horrors each day might bring; doubtful of my ability to keep silence as to the affairs of Arcangelo and Cosimo under the relentless urge of pain. Even now, this doubt is still with me; for I was not tortured.

When we got back to the city that night—or rather, in the dawn of the next day—for Alessandro could not pass the meanest tavern without tippling—a messenger met us just within the gate, with the news that Filippo Strozzi had ridden forth from Venice, followed by a certain body of horse; that he had been seen making his way into the open country to the south of Florence, and that he was suspected of preparing a descent upon the city.

I, head and heels hanging earthward, was abreast of the duke and Lorenzo when they received this news. I thought I saw Lorenzo's thin lips tighten for a moment and his eyes narrow. In fact, as I learned later, this move of Strozzi's was to his account—the beginning of the fulfillment of Cosimo's prophecy that such complex scheming as Lorenzo had been guilty of, must quickly bring catastrophe. Strozzi had come to suspect Lorenzo's good faith. In his own swift, terrifying manner he had acted on this suspicion.

The arguments which followed the receipt of the news I did not hear, though I should have liked to do so, seeing that they were the last throw of the dice of perhaps the cleverest, and certainly the wickedest, rogue of the age. I am assured that Lorenzo knew—though the duke did not—that Arcangelo and I had seen Cosimo; and therefore, that his pretensions to act in the name of that young man were doomed. Strozzi trusted him no longer and, as it later appeared, the Pope, fearing treachery from this triple betrayer, had already dispatched to Alessandro a cardinal—one Cybo—charged with the mission of exposing Lorenzo, and making his Holiness' peace with the duke.

It was indeed confusion thrice confounded; yet at the crucial moment Lorenzo did not despair. By flattery, bullying—I know not what means—he persuaded the duke that all the city's captains were republicans and traitors, and that the only leader for Florentine troops was the Duke of Florence. So, that same night, still half-drunk, Alessandro rode out of the city at the head of half-mutinous troops, to hunt down Strozzi. And Lorenzo remained at the Palazzo in command of the town!

Such was the news I gleaned when, a week after Christmas, there appeared at my cell door, his face all blubbered with tears, and his limbs still shaking from terror at the violence of the guards—they had searched him—none other than old Girolamo, our former landlord.

"I had a basket," he sobbed, "wines, cakes and some fruit—but they have taken it from me. Ah, Messer Benedetto, what a misfortune is this!"

I thought he was alluding to my plight and nodded gloomily.

"He is exiled from the city," moaned Girolamo, "and consider the circumstances of the young lady!"

My heart thundered.

"What is this?" I asked.

"I had thought thou knew—it is the talk of the city," said Girolamo, wiping his eyes. "The young lady that came to see thee when thou wast sick, Madonna Allegra. Twice she came, and the second time, play her part how she would, it was plain even to me that her eye had fallen favorably on Messer Arcangelo. And his on her. When he saw that I had noted this, he beat me soundly, and bade me never mention even that she had visited the house. But I thought he would have told thee later. Now he will beat me again. Messer Benedetto, I meant no scandal. Truly, their hands never so much as met—nor their eyes, save by accident——"

There was a roaring in my ears, yet I was most extremely calm.

"This young lady is in peril? What is all over the city?" I demanded.

"Peril enough when the duke began to visit the house twice a day," wailed Girolamo. "But what now! While his Highness is away, my lord Lorenzo is there continually. That is peril enough in itself, and now that they have arrested old Ginori——"

I had been sitting on my pallet, my hands folded on my knees. At these words I started as if I had been stabbed.

"Ugo Ginori arrested!" I cried.

But Girolamo had no time to answer. There was a scuffle of feet out in the stone-flagged passage, and three jailers rushed in and seized him. They had been posted without in the corridor to overhear what he might say; the gaining of information had been the only reason for his admittance. Now that he showed a disposition to give news instead of betraying the same he was silenced. Fool that I was!

"Save me!" shouted the wretched man, in an ecstasy of terror, as the guards, slamming the cell door against my frenzied charge at them, dragged him away down the passage. "Holy Mother, have mercy on me—I meant no wrong! Jesus pity me! Help——"

He was thrown into a cell and the door slammed on him. A moment later, my door was thrown open again, and there entered two of the guards who had taken him away, followed by a short, fat man whom I guessed at once to be the governor of the prison. He had a running at the nose and a vast sense of his own importance. The guards dragged me from my seat on my mattress—where I had sunk from excess of emotion at the news Girolamo had brought—and the governor sat down.

For some time he merely snuffled and wheezed. Then he raised his bleary eyes to my face and examined me with an expression of the greatest malice.

"Seize his arms, guards," he said thickly. "He hath a hanging look, and I would not have him hang on my account. Has the other turnkey gone to Signor Lorenzo with an account of what was overheard?"

"*Si, excellenzia,*" said the fellow on my right.

"It will interest him vastly," said the governor, wiping his nose.

He turned his little red eyes on me.

"Fellow, I am sent to take thy deposition."

"I—" I began.

He waved a pudgy hand at me, then drew it across his nose.

"Interrupt be dot!" he said with dignity. "Be dot precipidate, boy! I am the governor of the Fortezza da Basso. Therefore I am the Fortezza de Basso. The Fortezza is the duke's, so that when I speak to thee, I ab—" he choked with the extremity of his cold in the nose—"I *ab* the duke. As such, I am not to argue or plead with thee. I am here to take thy deposition if thou desire to give it to me. I am to ask once. If thou art not amenable, I ab to give orders for thy reboval to the Chaber of Horror."

"I am not prepared," I answered, restraining a mad desire to laugh in his face.

Possibly I was a little mad indeed. Within five minutes I had learned, remember, that my mistress was in love with my friend, that she was utterly defenseless before the duke and, worse, Lorenzo de' Medici—and now that I was to be tortured.

"Lead him away," said the blearyeyed governor, it seemed with a malicious satisfaction. "This will be a sad New Year for thee, boy."

He rose and leered at me.

"I will not essay the stairs," he grunted, going to the door. "Make my excuses to Signor Lorenzo. Pleasant dreams, Benedetto degli Rozzi. Thy father once pulled my nose."

"And if my hands were free, I would pull it again!" I told him.

"Strike him in the mouth," ordered the governor.

The guard at my right dealt me such a blow that it dazed me. And then I was hurried away, down the long corridor, past bolted doors from behind which came groans of prisoners already racked, hysterical cries from those in terror of torture, and, sometimes, wild laughter of those who had gone beyond reach of fear, if not pain—Lorenzo had arrested three hundred in five days. Past all these horrors, I say, down a winding turret stair to a hall in which clustered a hundred men-at-arms, down still another stair, on whose steps there lay puddles and where rats squeaked and scuttered before us—into the hold of the castle, from one room of which, visible at the end of a long, pitch-dark passage, came the faint ruddy glow of a fire. This, I knew, was the torture chamber of the Fortezza; the room a mention of which would send a shudder through a whole tavern and make the most reckless roysterer check a sneer at the duke and protest the greatest loyalty until he fell under the table.

Its door was ajar. I was thrust inside.

Seeing that place since, I have wondered how I could have taken so little notice of it then, when its appointments were of more immediate consequence to me than anything else in the world—including

Allegra Ginori, now lost to me utterly, it seemed.

Instead of thinking of her—the peep of her little feet under her fur-edged dress, the glow of her great brown eyes, the flutter of her white hands as I had seen them once in the Cathedral—and straining my heart and brain in fury at her present plight, and in wild plans for her delivery—I should have been noticing the grim instruments that, even had Arcangelo not done it already, were to cut me off from her forever. Close to my right hand was the rack, its foot and neck straps unbuckled, gaping for the next victim. Behind it, there was a bucket on a shelf and under it a carved oak chair standing in a puddle of water where some wretched creature had been maddened by the constant drip of drops on his head.

While his reason had tottered they had crushed his finger-joints to jelly—the thumb screws lay on the floor. Then there was the boot; and in a corner, looking like a harmless corner-cupboard, but with the spikes gleaming from its murderous door, stood the Maiden.

But in the midst of the floor, lighted by the glare of a brazier close at hand, was the scene which, after one instant, took all my attention.

Above the brazier, from which projected the handles of several irons, loomed the tall, thin figure of Lorenzo de' Medici. Before him tied hand and foot, lashed to a chair and watching the heating irons with staring eyes, was old Ugo Ginori!

"Go," said Lorenzo to my guards.

"The governor—" began one.

"Go!" shouted Lorenzo.

They released my arms and scurried away. Doubtless they thought Lorenzo mad—indeed his voice sounded so—yet he was no madder than he had always been. They say he was a genius, and that such are always on the verge of mania.

As thou hast heard, perhaps, it was after smashing the heads of a dozen statues—for no reason—that he had come to Florence in the first place; leaving Rome so that the Pope should not hang him. Twice since he had been Alessandro's favorite, he had followed to their homes girls who had taken his fancy in the street and demanded them at the sword's point of their fathers and brothers. One such father he had run through the body.

These memories flashed through my mind as, with eyes blazing and a strange smile about his lips, he passed close to me on his way to bolt the door. He had sent for me, yet he did not seem to be aware of my presence. Still smiling, he walked back slowly to the side of the brazier, drew forth a white-hot iron and held it near the face of Ugo Ginori.

The old man screamed and writhed. Lorenzo gave a diabolical chuckle. Starting forward, on an impulse I could not control, I found that, before leaving, the two guards had secured me beyond the possibility of giving any aid. A broad band of heavy leather encircled my chest under the arms and from behind, a chain ran to a staple in the wall. This chain clanked and hummed with the fury of my checked leap. I fell in a heap on the floor. Still Lorenzo did not notice me.

"Now wilt thou speak?" he said in a low, tense voice that withal had something like a chuckle in it. "Now wilt thou speak, old rat?"

"I have nothing—" began old Ugo, and suddenly broke into an appalling scream, a sound which seemed to freeze my very blood. The white-hot iron had fallen on one of his bound hands. A smell of burned flesh filled the room.

"Speak quickly," said Lorenzo, quietly as before. "I have tried fair means with thee, but now I must have thy secret. The duke is coming back tonight, and before he enters the city I must— Speak, speak. Where are the Black Bands?"

Once again the awful sound of that age-cracked voice raised to heaven in protest against unendurable torment thrilled through the room. The sweat broke out on my forehead, I ground my fingers into my ears, but Lorenzo moved no muscle. When, forced by the curiosity of horror, I unstopped my ears again, I heard Lorenzo's voice going quietly on.

"Perhaps thou lookest to thy niece to save thee," he said, "but thou art wrong, old fox. She is on my side—mine! Since thou hast been my guest here, I have been her guest at thy house. She inclines greatly to me, and would incline more if thou wouldst speak. For then I should be tyrant of Florence and a great lord, and she would cease to balk at the wife or so I married before I met her. Therefore speak! Where are the Black Bands?"

I heard a faint whisper.

"Louder!" snarled Lorenzo, his fury increasing, like an animal's, as his prey came nearer to his reach.

"The hills—the hills of—" said the faint voice.

"The hills!" shouted Lorenzo, "Ah-ha, Filippo Strozzi, I draw ahead of thee! What hills, old rat?"

He snatched a fresh iron from the brazier and brandished it amid a shower of sparks. I maintain that at this moment he was a madman.

"At Marcolo," came the whisper.

"At Marcolo!" shouted Lorenzo.

The iron bar clattered on the floor. At one bound he had gained the door near me and was shouting into the passage. A moment passed, and then there was the sound of footsteps running. It was just as an officer of the guard and three men with pikes came up, that I sprang for Lorenzo's throat. Could I have touched that neck with my hands they would never have loosed my grip until after his soul was at home in hell. But, as I sprang, one of the soldiers leaped forward, struck me with his shoulder in the ribs, and sent me gasping and stunned to the floor.

"Michele," said Lorenzo, seeming, in his intense excitement, not to notice this incident which had so nearly cost him his life, "I have an errand for thee, which, if thou succeed, shall bring thee what thou hast not dared to dream, and if thou fail, shall hang thee from a window as sure as I live by bread. Thou art to take two men and the best horses in the Fortezza and ride this night to Marcolo in the hills. There thou wilt find, if thou valuest thy neck, one Battista Goglio, commanding a troop of horse——"

"*Ah, dio!*" cried the officer. "The Black Bands! Signor Lorenzo——"

"Fool," snarled Lorenzo, "wouldst argue with me?"

"But he will hang me!" cried the man. "Filippo Strozzi——"

"He is not with Filippo Strozzi," said Lorenzo. "He is mine! Look you, Michele; since thou art with me, know this—for if thou know it and then betray me, thou wilt hang at my side. I have played a little with Filippo; so has the old man in yon chair. Filippo has come to suspect my good faith and yon old man has come to suspect Filippo's. The Black Bands fight for whoever pays them. Yon old man has paid them—on behalf of Filippo. Suspecting him, he has ordered them into hiding at the place I have told thee. They are his—and he is going to give us an order transferring them to my command!"

Ugo Ginori groaned.

Lorenzo strode over to him. From an armoire in the wall he drew inkhorn, pen and paper and, sitting, wrote. This done, he cut the bonds of Ugo's right hand, placed the paper before him, and gave him the pen.

"Sign!" he said.

While, groaning, he did so, I looked at the faces of the officer and the three soldiers. All four were pale; the officer was biting his lip; very evidently, their minds were ill at ease. In one way and another, but chiefly as a judge, I have since had much experience of conspirators and I have observed that many who will be joyful in the first part of the business—which consists of the estimation of rewards—will balk at the last, when there is question of neck-stretching. And the latter end of this affair of Lorenzo's was hazardous indeed.

Battista, I had heard, was a man who hanged intruders first and examined their credentials later; and if the plot as a whole went wrong, the duke would have no mercy. There would be a quick hanging for all if he was drunk, and a torture and a hanging for all if he was sober. The officer was biting his lip, in fact, until the blood came. I could imagine him taking another road than the one to Marcolo—the road to Venice—to Rome—anywhere, into safety.

"Here is thine order," cried Lorenzo, giving it into his hand. "Now away! Away, in the name of God!"

The officer hesitated a moment—but only a moment. Whatever his fears—and they were great, I could see—he could not resist the command in those blazing eyes so long as they were upon him. He bowed, turned, and with his soldiers, clattered away down the corridor. As he mounted the stairs at the end, I could hear him yelling for horses.

And now, passing his hand across his brow as if to brush away a veil from his brain, Lorenzo turned to me. For a moment, standing out of my reach, he surveyed me without speaking, his lips forming again into that queer smile.

Then:

"Yes, yes," he said slowly, "the business is not completed. We have Mars on our side; now for Venus. We have the armed men; now to get the money wherewith to pay them. Ho, guards!"

The two ruffians who had brought me to that place reappeared, cringing.

"Chain his hands and feet," said Lorenzo. "Bring me my cloak. Take that old man to his cell. Order my carriage to be ready."

Bowing, the villains hurried about their tasks. Old Ugo's head and arms flopped like a dead man's as they carried him away. He had in fact fainted, and was to die of the shock of the torture within forty-eight hours. Lorenzo did not glance at him; his eyes remained fixed on me—and mine on him for that matter. I do not think that there is possible to man a greater hate than I felt for that unspeakable devil. The excitement had left his face entirely. Now it was like a mask, behind which burned a black fire which shone through his eyes. The rest of his features were set in that smile which was no smile but a menace, it seemed, to the whole world, and especially to Allegra.

The men returned with his cloak, then hurled themselves on me and shackled hands and feet. I could not walk; they picked me up between them and awaited their master's orders.

"And the thumbscrews," said Lorenzo, as if to himself, walking over and picking up the pair from the floor. "Let us not forget the thumbscrews."

He put on his cloak.

"Take him to the carriage."

He followed as my bearers carried me down another passage than that by which we had come, to a postern-gate giving on the sunken courtyard at the south of the fortress. A carriage waited there. They thrust me within, standing aside then to let Lorenzo enter. I, deprived of the use of my feet, fell at once to the floor, where I was permitted to lie, my face in the straw, during the whole drive; Lorenzo's feet in my ribs. The two jailers, who were armed with arquebuses, rode on the steps.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour we jolted over the bad road from the fortress to the heart of the city; then our wheels rattled on the stones of a paved street until we stopped before a great bronze door, which I dimly remembered to have seen at another time.

Here Lorenzo alighted, and I was thrust out into a bitter wind. We entered the house, climbed, led by a house-servant with two candelabra, a flight of broad oaken stairs, and waited while our presence was announced.

"The most noble Signor Lorenzo de' Medici!" cried the servant.

"Admit him," said a girl's voice.

While those tones still rang in my ears, I was carried, after Lorenzo, into a great room, richly furnished, and permitted to see, as well as hear, that the girl was Allegra. She had been standing, clad in a gown of brocade trimmed with the marten's fur she affected at throat, sleeves and hem, before the fire, whence she had now advanced that Lorenzo might kiss her hand.

It was as he rose from this exercise, and still held her hand in his own, that her eyes fell on the strange trio of figures which, reeking with jail and horror, had followed this elegant gentleman into her presence. I do not know whether she recognized me on the instant. I was thin and pale and grimed with prison dirt. If she did, she gave no sign.

"What is this?" she asked in a slow, hard voice.

"I have brought a friend of thine to plead my cause with thee, *madonna*," said Lorenzo de' Medici, as slowly and as hard as she had spoken.

He motioned the jailers to lay me on a couch, which stood in the full light of a pedestal lamp.

"A friend of mine?" said Allegra, in a strange, breathless voice.

Lorenzo drew from his pocket the thumbscrews he had taken from the torture-chamber, and laid them on the carpet near me—before my eyes and Allegra's.

"Aye, a friend of thine—a dear friend," he said, smiling.

He turned to the guards.

"Retire," he ordered, pointing to the door, "and let none enter."

V

SHE knew me. She had, in spite of what Girolamo had said, enough sympathy to constrain her on my behalf, and the struggle she made to play for time by disclaiming knowledge of me showed so plainly in the sweet, candid oval of her face that Lorenzo grinned wolfishly and thought himself licensed to approach her closely.

"There is no use in dissimulation, *madonna*—" he began.

"Stand back," said Allegra. She spoke quietly, but in such manner as to halt Lorenzo suddenly both in speech and movement. When he spoke again, he stammered.

"I—I protest—" he began.

Allegra retreated from him swiftly and took up the position she had first held by the fireplace—one arm lying along the marble shelf of the mantel, the other on her hip, her slim body in its clinging dress outlined by the glow of the logs. Her mouth was very red; her eyes seemed to smolder as she turned them on Lorenzo.

"I had thought we were friends," she said coldly.

"I had thought so too," said Lorenzo in much the same tone, "but within the last two hours, *madonna*, I have been afflicted by doubts."

"The evidence must have been very strong, *signor*," said Allegra, "to drive thee to this, after I have risked what I have risked for thee. What if I had sent to the duke concerning thy visits to this house? What if I had informed the Council that my uncle was not gone to Venice, but was a prisoner of thine—albeit thou'd promised not to injure him?"

"Which promise he did not keep, for he—" I cried.

Lorenzo made a murderous move toward me.

"Have I not informed thee concerning my uncle's plottings?" went on the girl steadily—though it seemed to me, at my words, she had grown a trifle paler and her eyes larger.

Lorenzo stopped and looked at her.

"Thou hast told me nothing I did not know, *madonna*," he said, "for my bodyguard, of whom thou hast perhaps heard—the Scoronconcolo, who is to join me here in two hours—was in thine uncle's councils from the first. What he did not know, and what thou wouldst not tell me either, was the information I have just gained from thine uncle himself—the whereabouts of the Black Bands."

"Dost thou therefore doubt my faith?" demanded the girl.

"Not 'therefore,'" said Lorenzo, "but on another account. For I have just heard that even while thou hast been smiling on me, thou hast visited two persons violently opposed to me, of whom this lad on the couch is the lesser. Girolamo, their landlord, is my informant. How now, *madonna?* Is this cause for the provision of safeguards?"

Allegra stared at him pale, stricken.

"I am not hard with thee," said Lorenzo in the tone of the victor, "but now I tell thee, *madonna*, thou art too dangerous to be at large. I have before asked thee for thy hand, which thou hast refused. Tonight, thou must consent—shalt consent, it can not be otherwise. After this night, we may be wed—after this night, I shall hold Florence in the palm of my hand, and may be divorced thrice a day, if I desire. We but anticipate my divorce, in this wedding. And that we must do. Since the duke has gone, I have worked night and day for thee, all for thee. Now, for the last three days, the people have been turning to my side. It lacks but one thing that the whole city shall rise and follow my lead to overthrow the duke. And that one thing is that I shall announce in the Piazza della Signoria tonight that the Ginori party has joined with mine, and that in token of the same, I marry thee."

"There is also the question of money," said Allegra, as if to herself. Then: "How is it that the people have come to thy side so quickly? *Thou* hast not dared to call them to rebellion, I know."

There was the bitterest contempt in her tone, but he did not note it.

"*Madonna*," he said, in the voice of a man inspired. "It is clearly to be seen that Heaven favors my projects. The day before yesterday, while a poor half-dozen soldiers I could trust were circulating among the citizens, speaking to them in whispers, there arose suddenly a hooded monk upon a mounting-block in the New Market, and in a loud voice, publicly, called upon the townspeople to revolt. Without doubt, he is demented; he wears his capuche drawn over his face, and from this obscurity speaks like an oracle.

"But the folk think he is Fra Savonarola come back to earth, and cluster around him shouting. Before I could issue orders, the town-guard had tried to arrest him. The crowd tore ten of them into rags. Since then, he has been speaking here, there and everywhere; denouncing the corruption of the duke, praising the ancient freedom of this city, and calling for a march on the Palazzo Vecchio. He moves about the city like a wraith and everywhere he appears, there spring up a thousand recruits to my cause."

"To thy cause?" asked Allegra.

"Yes, though he, belike, doth not intend it," said Lorenzo, "for hark you, *madonna*, I am no fool. This afternoon, an emissary of mine bespoke this monk, applying a test to see whether it were better to leave him at large to carry on his work, or to throw him in jail and take his followers. And the hooded monk is ours!"

"And the test?"

Lorenzo hesitated a moment.

"He was told the situation of affairs, and commanded to appear at this house this night, to marry thee to me," he said.

There was a perfect silence for perhaps twenty seconds.

"Then this is the meaning of yon bound man and the thumbscrews?" said Allegra, in a voice of steel. "To force me into this sinful wedlock if I would not otherwise consent?"

"*Madonna, madonna*," said Lorenzo, grim and dominant, "unless thou art a traitress whom I had better hang, thou art with me here. If thou art not, then must I compel thee. Thou hast drawn from me little by little all my plans; then hast consorted with the other side; now, by ——, thou art too dangerous to stay at large. Thou must be bound to me somehow, and no whim, no memory of past tenderness, must interfere. I will be frank. As thou knowest, I love thee; moreover, I must have thee. Thy refusal now would mean more than the breaking of my heart. I have the Black Bands at my call; the people are raging. If I have not thy name and thy fortune wherewith to control them, it will be a matter of my neck. Therefore I have double-guarded against accidents."

Outside, there arose suddenly a great confusion of shouting, as far away, perhaps, as the end of that street. As suddenly, it ceased. A moment later it was receding, the shouts of '*Popolo e liberta!*' growing fainter.

"The duke is perhaps an hour away with his army, yet they shout thus for me," cried Lorenzo. "Is such a chance to be lost for any whim or any plan of thine. Nay, nay, *madonna*, beware. This boy before thee may have some claim on thy heart, but he has none on mine. I would slay fifty of him before thou shouldst refuse me. And slay them slowly, before thy eyes."

* * *

A KNOCK fell on the door. Lorenzo stepped over and opened it. From without came the husky voice of one of the jailers.

"My lord," it said, "here is a priest."

Lorenzo turned and shot one glance at Allegra. While his back had been turned, her eyes had held mine. We had gazed at each other as might two rabbits in a trap—frenzied, helpless. Then, suddenly, her hand had flown to her bosom, and as quickly dropped away. As I learned later, she had resolved—since Lorenzo's too-great villainy had checkmated her design for the defeat of his plot—to stab him at the moment of the marriage.

But now, looking at her, the rogue saw that her head was sunk on her outflung arm and thought it to betoken submission.

"Enter, father," he said, and a shrouded figure strode into the room; I say strode, because there was something majestic about the movement of this tall man in the all-enveloping brown robe and hood. But in fact, the monk limped, as if there had been no joints in his left leg; and when he stopped in the middle of the room and turned the black cavern of the front of his hood first on Allegra, then on Lorenzo and lastly on me—this left leg he threw out strangely, putting no weight on it.

Altogether, he was a figure of mystery such as for a moment to silence even Lorenzo as he turned away from closing the door. The wind howled outside, snuffled down the wide throat of the chimney and sent a gust of smoke puffing into the room. Against this background, the splay-legged Franciscan looked somewhat like an emissary of the devil.

"I have heard much of thee," said Lorenzo, approaching him.

The monk made no answer, but seemed to shrink within his robe, thrusting his hands still further up his wide sleeves.

"And I have much to say to thee," went on Lorenzo, "after we have completed the business for which thou art here. But time presses—so first the marriage and then the talk."

Still no answer.

Then, suddenly as a flash of lightning, the friar's right arm flew from the left sleeve into which it had been deeply plunged, and out from that sleeve, following the hand like a streak of light, followed the blade of a long rapier. That was the stiff leg—the sword had been strapped to it. That was the deep thrusting of the hands—through the bell sleeves the right hand rested on the hilt. And instantly, before I could even gasp, the point was an inch from Lorenzo's throat!

"Nay," said a quiet voice, "time presses, but otherwise than thou thinkest. We will therefore talk first, considering the marriage later."

The hand that was not holding the sword flung back the capuche.

Into the suddenly paled face of Lorenzo stared the terrible blue eyes of Arcangelo!

"Whisper just one word, and I will spear it as it comes up," he said softly.

Lorenzo drew breath, and the point touched his neck.

"I have not yet slain any man in cold blood," said Arcangelo, "but thou art a man with whom I could start. Therefore obey me to the letter. Thought me far away, ha-ha? *Madonna*, go to the door and receive the keys of Benedetto's handcuffs from the jailers. Order them to deliver them, thou!"

Lorenzo hesitated; then, as the steel bore against him, he cried the order. Allegra opened the door enough to let in the jailer's wrist. There was a jangle of iron and a moment later she was bending over me, her hair brushing my face, unlocking my manacles and fetters. Yet I noticed at that moment that she seemed unconscious of me; her face was set and drawn, her eyes blank; and as soon as I was free, she turned back to the tableau of the two men in the middle of the room.

"Benedetto," said Arcangelo. "Chain him!"

I shambled stiffly across the floor and snapped the locks around Lorenzo's ankles and arms; joining the chains—as his jailers had taught me—so that the bonds held his hands behind him, and his whole body so stiffly upright that a push would have sent him reeling over backward. This done, with a lightning movement, Arcangelo drew the prisoner's sword and dagger and handed them to me.

"Buckle them on," he snapped, his eyes never leaving Lorenzo. "*Madonna*, give me thy silk scarf—good—and so——"

He dropped the sword, which fell without noise to the carpet, seized Lorenzo's jaws with fingers that seemed to crush the very teeth as they forced the mouth open, gagged him and then, gently, lowered the helpless body to the floor.

This done, he straightened, looked at Allegra and then at me and smiled.

"Benedetto," he said, beginning to divest himself, like a snake of its skin, of the monastic habit, "I am late to thy rescue, but I could not help it. Cosimo and I went to seek the Bands, as thou knowest. Filippo Strozzi is on the same quest. We had to avoid him while we searched—of course in vain. Foolishness! And then what with cold and disappointment my poor cousin by marriage took sick of a cursed fever that shook him out of his saddle. I must needs bring him to a hiding place near Florence and nurse him a week. Released from which duty, I turned to the question of Mistress Allegra, for that her uncle was arrested. But she had taken refuge——"

"Nay!" cried Allegra, as if in agony. "Nay, Signor Arcangelo! Listen, and may God witness my truth. I perceived that I could do nothing to save my uncle save by strategy, and the only plan I could think on was to bring the Black Bands to his aid. He had never told me how I could find them—it was his dearest secret; that they were his alone was his whole power. I must needs find it out from this villain; who I know has forced the secret from him; whom accordingly I have flattered and——"

"Didst find out?" snapped Arcangelo.

So long as she had been protesting her innocence of aught wrong, Allegra had spoken passionately. Now all interest left her voice.

"No," she answered, turning away.

"Then must I," said Arcangelo, turning his eyes on Lorenzo, "and forthwith. For tonight thou and I ride to find those same Bands, Benedetto; and either we return with them, or we return not at all. Wherefore——"

He had thrown aside his monk's robe now, and stood arrayed in a plain black suit, from the neck of which, according to his untidy fashion, protruded four or five rows of mail.

"They are at Marcolo above Fiesole," I said.

"How dost thou know?" asked Arcangelo, watching with interest Lorenzo's furious writhing on the floor.

"Because he has sent messengers to them this very night," I told him.

"How long gone?"

"An hour! The old man spoke but today."

Arcangelo stared down at Lorenzo for a full minute, without speaking or moving.

"And the duke," he said at last, very slowly, "has passed the inn which stands two miles from the city gates. Within half an hour he will be here. When thy messengers bring back the Bands, Lorenzo, the city will be closed and fortified, and filled with soldiers, thou fool. By Peter, I could nail thee to the floor! And once they are out of their hiding-place, as they return empty-handed, Filippo Strozzi will gain them. Ods blood; thou snake!"

"It would be all the same if thou had them," said I.

The blue eyes fastened on me.

"Considering that I was about to raise the city to save thee from torture," said Arcangelo, "it is ungrateful of thee, Benedetto, to think me such a fool. If *I* were at the head of the Bands, the gates would be thrown wide. I am Fra Savonarola returned to the flesh; and lo! certain godly villains of the town-guard on the walls, have been impressed by my dialectics. If *I* lead the Black Bands, the fat-faces will not fire, I think. If any other rides at their head, the guard will shoot the Black Bands into red ribbons, by ——!"

He took his lower lip between finger and thumb.

"*Madonna*," he said slowly, "thou art the question. Benedetto and I will ride to pull victory out of defeat; but now it is unlikely that we shall return. If we return not, Cosimo will not gain the throne, and thou wilt be left protectionless."

"From what?" asked the girl slowly.

"The duke," said Arcangelo.

Slowly, her eyes on him, Allegra drew forth the stiletto she had destined for the heart of Lorenzo de' Medici.

"Nay," she said, "for I have always this."

And then, without a warning, without a moment's pause, she dropped in a heap on the carpet and burst into passionate tears. I sank on my kneees beside her, raised her head to my ragged shoulder, and, with my heart beating as if it would choke me, at the fairness of her, tried to stay her sobbing, but I could not. She wept on, quietly, but as if inconsolable at least by me; and Arcangelo, frowning, his face sad yet abstracted, towered over us motionless.

"We must go," he said at last; "we must go——"

And then, as if to cofirm him, there came to our ears the sound again of distant shouting, but of shouting very different from the cheers we had heard when Arcangelo, in his monk's garb, was approaching the house. These shouts were thin and scattered and though they cried, "*Palle, palle!*" there was, as it were, a rumble under the shout that meant no good to the golden balls on the red ground. Nor to us—for they meant that the duke was in the city.

"Up, Benedetto!" cried Arcangelo, grasping me by the shoulder.

Perforce I rose. Allegra, full length on the carpet, wept on. Anon she laughed a moment—a terrible laugh with tears on each side of it and through it. The sound rent my heart, but Arcangelo held me fast.

"Listen!" he said a moment later.

Hooves were clicking on the cobblestones near at hand. One man shouted the Medici cry in the street below.

"Woman!" whispered Arcangelo tensely, bending over Allegra. "Wouldst hang us? Rise!"

Her sobbing stopped at the word, she raised her head and an instant later, her hand in Arcangelo's, was on her feet.

"The duke is coming here!" he whispered tensely. "And thou must play thy game for all our heads!"

The sound of hooves on the paving was now closer and over it came the voice of some sergeant wheeling his men around the corner.

"Listen to me! Is there an ante-room? We must hide this Lorenzo——"

Allegra pointed to a curtain, drew it aside and, stooping, Arcangelo snatched up Lorenzo and carried him within.

"Is there no better place than this?" he gasped. "This has no door. The duke may wander in here."

"There is none other unless you pass the guards at the door," said Allegra.

"Then go tell them in their master's name to hide ere the duke comes," said Arcangelo.

And she flew to the door with the message, but it was too late. From the street came the clank of an armed man's dismounting and then, without the preliminary of a knock, the overlord of Florence threw open the door of the house and entered. We heard the footsteps of the jailers running to cover along the passage; but at the same time we heard on the great stairway the clank of Alessandro ascending in his armor.

"*Madonna, madonna,* I am back from the wars!" cried his bull's voice with a drunken quaver in it.

There was nothing for it but flight—if there was that. Arcangelo thrust the body of his enemy into the darkest corner of the alcove and together we rushed into the larger room again. Allegra, her face pale and still tear-stained, her eyes wide, was holding open the door and pointing down the corridor.

"The back stairs," she gasped. "In the name of God, hasten!"

We needed no urging. Arcangelo snatched up his monk's robe and his sword, the thumbscrews I kicked out of sight, and then, as the mailed tread of Alessandro turned the last curve of the stairway, we ran as if the devil were after us, down the passage. I know not where the two jailers had concealed themselves, I never saw them more, but for our part, ignorant of the whereabouts of the back stairs, we stumbled on them by chance.

The duke reached one end of the passage before we had gained the other. We hurled ourselves by common consent against a door that was near us; it gave and we saw stretching before us a narrow flight of stone steps, leading past the kitchens to the rear of the house.

A MOMENT later, we stood in a mean lane bordered with garbage and the like. There was, we saw in the light from one of the windows, a cart standing there, of the sort used for the removal of such rubbish to a place without the city walls. The men who had been loading it, though, had left work to stare at the armed men at the front of the house. Their shovels, and the cloaks they had thrown off for convenience in working, lay on the cart.

So much I noticed without attention, as I started to hurry away, I knew not whither, down the street, but Arcangelo's hand closed tightly on my arm and pulled me to a halt.

"Body of God!" he muttered. "This is Providence! Benedetto, we are saved!"

He snatched one filthy cloak from the cart and hung it about my shoulders: then, throwing his monkish habit into the driver's seat, draped himself in the other.

"I had not thought to come to this," he murmured, dragging me forward to the side of the cart, "but better this carriage than the hangman's! Climb, Benedetto!"

He swung himself up over the wheel, took the reins and clicked with his tongue to the knock-kneed animals between the shafts.

"Benedetto," he said earnestly, as the cart creaked forward, "I had puzzled, somewhat, while we came down those stairs, as to how we were to reach the horses which have awaited us this past week, outside the city walls, but thou seest even a garbage barrow may serve the purpose of the stars. Now am I certain that Cosimo shall have the throne. This, boy, is an omen, however it stinketh——"

We had passed the alleyway which led to the front of the house, where the laborers were standing, but, our wheels muffled by the thick mud of the lane, they had not heard anything. We went slowly for another hundred yards, until we turned into a broader road, sloping down-hill. Then Arcangelo shook the reins and clicked with his tongue.

"Battista, who has sworn to have my life—Lorenzo's messengers—Filippo Strozzi's scouts notwithstanding," he said, as we jolted through the inky blackness toward the city walls, "we shall triumph, Benedetto!"

But my mind was full of the awful situation of Allegra, especially in this respect.

Lorenzo had said that the Scoronconcolo had orders to join him there in two hours.

What when he came?

VI

IN OUR own business there was no hitch. Whatever the political estate of a city, whatever the terror, fury or joy of its inhabitants, wood must still be hewn, water drawn, and the wreckage of its feeding carried away; so that the gate-guard, quivering as they were with apprehension of Strozzi before and the murmuring city behind, let us through without thought. A mile down the road, under a dripping yew-tree, held by the ostler who had once served under Arcangelo, and who now wore morion and leather jack as if to accompany us, were three horses.

By dawn of the next day, the sixth of January, 1537, we were riding up the narrow flint-strewn path which, skirting the village of Marcolo, ran into the hills. They were really no more than a series of waves or folds in the land, though the ascent of them through the gray mist made our tired horses gasp and shake their heads, and I was surprized to note that Arcangelo seemed to know exactly whither he was going.

"It would be strange if I did not," he told me, "seeing that it was I, with Giovanni de' Medici, who picked this particular hiding-place. There are caves in it. It is not to be forgotten, Benedetto, in the light of what may follow, that *I* became captain of this troop after Giovanni's death, and that this Battista is no more than a usurper."

"Captain!" cried Antonio, from behind us. "There is the Hill of the Wood!"

The pallid sun, striking through the upper layers of the mist, showed dimly to our left a hillock crowned with dark trees. Arcangelo pulled his horse to a halt.

"Very true," he said, and dismounted. "Antonio, do thou guard the horses. Benedetto——"

"Signor Captain," began Antonio, "I——"

"How?" demanded Arcangelo, with a rasp in his tone.

Antonio said no more. In a hurried and terrified manner he saluted, fumbled for the reins of the two horses and set his regretful face into an expression of stony submissiveness.

"From henceforth," said my companion, in this strange curt tone, "let not my garb or manner lead thee to mistake me for a civilian. I reestablish discipline. Dost understand, lunkhead?"

Antonio saluted again.

"*Si, signor capitan,*" he said like an automaton.

Without another word, Arcangelo turned and strode away across the drenched grass of the little valley that lay between us and the Hill of the Wood, I following. Halfway, he threw up his head and sniffed the air.

"Smoke," he snarled, "and never a sentry in sight. This is fine strategy, Battista *mio*. By the splendor of God, it is time I rejoined my troop."

"Pity ever thou left them," said I.

"Nay," said Arcangelo through his teeth, "that had I to do when Cosimo grew to an age to need my services. The pity is that they left me to follow this scoundrel Battista. Now come with caution. Here is the Witch's Throat."

The shoulder of the hill broke, as we turned a corner, into a narrow pass, running between two boulders like vast gateposts, and obscured by the shadow of two towering trees. In this obscurity, as Arcangelo's hand, pressing on my breast, stopped me, I perceived a dim glint of steel. There was an armed man on guard. Suddenly I saw him stop in his pacing of the ground before the boulders, and then there was a rattle as he brought his pike to the ready.

"Who comes?" he demanded. "Halt!"

Upon which, without speaking, Arcangelo stepped forward to within two yards of him.

"I," he said. And then, slowly and grimly. "So 'tis thou, Michele Arrizo?"

There was a pause, and then the sentry's voice, strangely breathless—

"Give the word or I——"

Around my father's castle, I have heard wolves snarl as they leaped on each other; it was with just such a snarl that Arcangelo, snatching aside the point of the pike, now leaped on this man. There was no time for the drawing of sword or dagger but, doubling his fingers as it were into a ball, Arcangelo smote the sentry between the eyes. There was a sound very like the striking of wood with a hammer, a rattle of mail and the man crumpled forward and fell with his arms outflung as if dead.

"Come," said the curt voice from above him.

Side by side we went through the dark throat of the pass, emerging after perhaps ten yards into a valley surrounded by low hills. The light was growing every minute stronger, and the mist thinner, as the dawn-breeze began to riffle down from the leaden sky; and so we could perfectly see the floor of the depression in all its length and breadth. Yet we did not so examine it, for our eyes instantly flew to the center of the valley where, drawn up in column with their sable flag at their head, stood the most famous troop of horse in the history of Italy—the Black Bands, ready for the field.

I heard Arcangelo draw a long breath through his teeth. I started forward, but he restrained me.

"Nay," he said, never taking his eyes off the column, "infantry must never attack cavalry, my Benedetto, and we are dismounted. I know not whither Battista plans to lead yon troops, but wherever it be——"

He drew his sword.

"—we will intercept them," he concluded, taking up position well away from the somber background of the pass, where the full light of the sky would strike upon him, "here!"

It was just as he flung off his hat, lifted his chin, and dropped his sword-point to the ground like a man who prepares for the *duello*, that the cavalry began to move. When they saw us, when those in the lead recognized Arcangelo, I do not know. The troop came on at a steady trot, surmounting the gentle slope toward us with a steadiness of speed, a smoothness of motion, like that of some gigantic snake with scales of glittering steel.

Only when the head of the column was fifty yards away from us was there the slightest sign that in its resistless advance the troop would not ride over us, crushing us into the ground like the worms we seemed before its perfectly attuned and remorseless power.

But at that point, a great voice from ahead roared the halt. The word flew backward down the line, squeaked, snapped and bellowed in the motley voices of the sergeants, and, without the confusion of one uncontrolled horse in its ranks, the advance stopped.

Arcangelo did not move. The squat giant who, by his attendant standard-bearer and his greater nearness to us, I perceived to be the captain, did not move. The troop, save for certain horse which snorted steam into the air and pawed the ground, sat dark and motionless; and so it was for an eternity, it seemed, while I noted that nowhere was to be seen the officer sent forth by Lorenzo de' Medici. He would have been riding by the captain. So, then, he had failed in courage, as I had thought he would.

Arcangelo spoke, very slowly and clearly. "Good day, Battista."

And almost at the same moment, in a voice that seemed to have hidden somewhere in it the hoarseness of alarm, the broad man at the head of the troop shouted—

"Sergeant—arrest——"

He got no further. He was, as I esteem it, perhaps twenty feet from us; yet in the compass of those two words, Arcangelo had almost covered the distance, less with a run than with a leap, as it appeared—the leap of a hungry or a maddened animal. His sword, as he came up to Battista's side, he flung to the grass, regardless of the standard-bearer, who was tugging at his sword, and of his enemy, in whose hand already shone a dagger. From the side of the horse, his arms reached up, closed about the waist of Battista and pulled him sidewise in his saddle.

The dagger rose and fell against a mailed shoulder, the horse, flinging up his head, neighed loudly in fear and then, as the standard-bearer's sword sang an inch above Arcangelo's head, Battista's feet left the stirrups. For an instant, he was held in his attacker's arms, and then, with a crash, he struck the ground and went rolling.

Arcangelo picked up his sword and motioned me to his side. Battista, encumbered by his half-suit of plate, was struggling to his feet, cursing.

"See that we are left alone," said my friend in a low voice, and then loudly, "Rise, Battista, and let us settle our affair."

Scarcely had he spoken than, with a yell of fury, his enemy had drawn sword and was upon him.

For the first few passes, I watched the troop. It did not move. The standard-bearer, an evil-looking fellow with one eye, made as if to spur his horse forward to his leader's aid, but a voice from the ranks behind bade him withhold, and he sat still.

"Thy sword-play is better than either thy morals or thy strategy," said Arcangelo's voice, "but it would bear improvement, Battista."

I turned and looked—my back, since I faced the troop, was perforce on this fight. The blades were flickering so fast that I could hardly perceive the separate thrusts and parries, but, with a terrible series of *stramazoni,* Arcangelo was forcing Battista to the defensive.

"But for thy plate, I had spitted thee," said Arcangelo, "once through thy black heart—thus—" his point clicked against the breastplate "—once through thy sour liver—so—and again in thy over-greedy stomach. But since I would kill thee otherwise——"

Battista had lost his length; he was parrying too close in. It seemed that in another moment, his arm cramped, he must be a fraction of a second too late for one of the lightning-like reaches of the long blue blade toward his throat, but, as Arcangelo came to the end of that speech, suddenly the attack appeared to weaken. Battista's sword, released for an instant from the business of guard, shot out to the attack.

With a supreme effort, lunging without first a thrust, staking all on this terrible blow, he sped his point at Arcangelo's throat in turn. And the next instant, by a swinging down-slash of the other rapier, which met his with the singing swish of perfect contact, thick-to-thin, he was disarmed. But at the very instant his blade rolled up to the hooves of the horses of the first rank, and lay there gleaming, Arcangelo's sword fell again to the grass. Battista, not fully recovered in balance from that last wild lunge, felt bare hands, more terrible, it seemed to me, than the steel, encircle his throat; and the muscles of Arcangelo's mighty arms began to force that dark, broad face backward over the straining shoulders into death. There was a choked howl, a thud and the two men fell writhing to the ground where, snarling locked in an indistinguishable mass, they were to end their feud.

When men slay other men for the sake of a city or a creed, the arquebus, the steel, poison or the hangman's rope are equally excellent; but when man hates man in his proper person, for a private cause, then he hungers for the flesh of his enemy under his bare hands.

I glanced again at the troop. Still it sat motionless, and as I looked back, the hatred between Arcangelo and Battista his supplanter was over. By some frightful means —tearing himself from his foe's grip at the cost of an ear ripped away, Battista had got to his feet. Now, hissing like a viper with the last of the breath of life that was in him, crouching low, he whipped out the dagger he had sheathed when the swordplay began.

That attempt to turn the tables by unfair means was his death-warrant; for, as Arcangelo leaped in upon him, he struck once, and missing, had not time to recover himself. The awful arms went about him, pinioning his dagger-hand to his side, the grip shifted, catching him by buttock and shoulder and then, head-downward, like a bolt from a gun, he was hurled to the earth, where he lay, his neck twisted under him, arms outflung, instantly dead.

And over his body, Arcangelo surveyed the troop. For a little he surveyed them in silence, gasping deeply, and then he spoke—

"So, my children," he said, in a cracked, hoarse voice, "I have returned to you. Yon Cyclops was not my gonfalonier," he continued, his voice curter as his breath came back. "Thou, Piero Scarface, take that flag!"

For an instant there was no movement, then a grizzled veteran with a broad white line across his face from eye-corner to jaw, spurred his horse forward. The standard changed hands.

" 'Tis well," said Arcangelo. "I see ye remember me. It had been better never to forget. Benedetto, take yon horse of One-Eye. Run at Piero's stirrup, thou."

We mounted, and he swung his horse about so that he faced the troop. In a loud voice, he bespoke them.

"Dogs," he began, "I have no more to say to ye than this—that I am not come back for long; only to lead ye from the lean days of this Battista into other and fat ones. After this day, ye will serve different masters no longer, but one only, who is as quick with the purse as with the rope. He is Cosimo, son of Giovanni, and my cousin, and ye will make him further, Duke of Florence."

His eyes searched over the heads of the front ranks, as if to pierce into the faces of the masses beyond; he opened his mouth to say somewhat more, but closed it again and smiled. This smile, which broadened his mouth and made his blue eyes dance, he endeavored to conceal, first by coughing, and then by turning away and roaring the order to march. But the front ranks had seen it, and from one to another it spread, until, turning, at the far side to the Witch's Throat, to see if the column was yet all out of the defile, I saw that all the battered faces within my eyeshot were smiling too—grimly, forbiddingly, but smiling. And, looking back at Arcangelo, I perceived that a tear was now running down each cheek.

"—— cutthroats!" he growled as Antonio cantered up to us with the horses.

It was then he saw that Antonio's face was drawn and anxious as if with some inheld bad news.

"What is it?" he snapped at him.

"*Signor capitan*," he stammered, "I would have brought the news sooner, but that I dared not quit my post——"

"What is it?" demanded Arcangelo.

"*Signor*, while I waited, there passed a fellow who was formerly employed with me at the inn, now riding as a courier of Cardinal Cybo's. Of whom I demanded the news. And he answered that Signor Cosimo de' Medici was—was——"

"What, in God's name?" cried Arcangelo, in a voice that chilled my blood. "Was slain? Slain! He is murdered! I see it in thy face. Now, how? Tell me how!"

"He—he did not know," stammered Antonio, terrified at the awful white face which stared into his. "He heard only rumor from the servants—while he awaited—the letter, *signor*. But it appears that Duke Alessandro went to the house of a lady and there found Signor Lorenzo de' Medici, and it was Signor Lorenzo who slew——"

There sounded a groan like that of a wounded animal. I could not believe it came from the throat of the grim, blood-stained man at my side, yet so it did.

"Then," said Arcangelo's voice, strangely lifeless, "Lorenzo has bought his own life by hunting down Cosimo."

He wheeled to the troop.

"Dogs, swine, most abominable worms, while ye have been haggling with this one and that, they have murdered the only son of your dead master!"

A dread murmur rose and swelled into a mutter.

"I hear," said my companion's voice, with a break in it, "that ye regret this. And now hear me. We will ride hence for one purpose. This night, we will exchange our black flag for the bloody head of Alessandro and the entrails of his jackal. As for the city of Florence, it shall burn to light us at our work!"

The mutter rose to a roar.

Arcangelo turned and pointed across the drizzling wind-swept hills.

"Then," he shouted, "canter!"

VII

IT IS well known how, five miles from the city as dusk was coming down, we met a reconnoitering patrol of that boasted Venetian cavalry of Filippo Strozzi's, and exterminated the same to the last man. The blood-lust was in us; we hungered to slay; and besides, there was military reason for that affair. Far off as we were, we could hear the bells of the Florentine churches ringing strange, disordered tocsins and there came to us on the wind a sound of humming like that of a hornet's nest overturned.

As we thundered down on the approaching body of horse, Arcangelo muttered to me that the people had risen, and that the city was in revolt. We could see the red glow of a blazing house. To the troop behind, he yelled an order to let no man of these scouts bear the news of this weakness to Strozzi. And none did. It was as well, for had that captain but known, he could have led his whole army into the city through the open gate by which we entered and enslaved the population while the wall-guards were howling "Liberty! Liberty!" in the New Market.

We had not halted the bearing of that news without some damage to ourselves. When Arcangelo paused at the gate, and in the light of the burning house, to tell off a guard for the gate, I saw that there were two men missing from the front rank, and that the armor of certain others was sorely dented, with blood running down a breastplate here and there. Arcangelo had a sword-slash over the back of his hand; and in place of a hat, I myself wore a strip of shirt, holding two portions of my scalp together.

The eight men and the sergeant who drew out of the column to mount guard looked less like soldiers than dead heroes from their graves for Armageddon. Had our cause been any other, or Arcangelo less than he was, we should have left half our strength behind, wounded. But now, no man left his saddle unless he fell therefrom, as a few did on our jingling way through deserted by-streets toward the Arno. It was Arcangelo's plan to detour to the south of the Piazza della Signoria, and to be there when the mob, now howling and waving torches in the New Market, should have gathered courage for the storming in the Palazzo Vecchio.

"Their fury is the fruit of my preaching," he said through his teeth, "but they must curb it—they must curb it. My revenge is by no means to be taken from me by such as they."

We halted again, to send another guard to the Gate of the Arno. By this time another fire had broken out and the shouting from the direction of the New Market was changing its tone to a deeper note.

Arcangelo slipped over his head the monk's robe he still carried on his saddle.

"There is no time to be lost," he muttered, as we turned into the narrow street which leads directly past the west of the Palazzo Vecchio into the piazza before it. "Gallop!"

The hooves struck fire from the cobbles and, crashing through the darkness, we entered the Piazza della Signoria. Halfway around it we went, until the head of the column was opposite the road leading from the New Market; and we so halted.

"The clock is whirring before it strikes," snapped Arcangelo, as a roar from many throats swept down toward us, "but I think we have still five minutes. Five men and the gonfalon follow me! Benedetto, come thou too!"

We clattered across to the door of the Palazzo Vecchio and dismounted. There were no sentries outside the vast portal. Arcangelo, his sword drawn, hammered on the oak like a madman.

"Open in the name of God," he yelled.

He stopped suddenly, for from within came the sound of one dominant, clear voice forcing into silence the buzz of a dozen others.

"Shall I hide from my people," it demanded. "Nay! Open the door!"

An instant later the gate swung back, and a cardinal, that same Cardinal Cybo of whom we had heard, stood before us.

"In the name of God," he began, raising his hand as if to forbid us entry,

He was thrust aside and a slim figure in plate stood before us, sword in hand.

"I am he you seek," said the first voice, "and——"

Arcangelo uttered a strange cry.

"Cosimo!" he shouted.

An instant later he had the boy in his arms.

"They said thou wast dead," he sobbed, "and instead thou art only about to be torn to pieces by a mob!"

He knelt and recited a *gloria*.

"—Amen. And how the —— did this come to pass?" he demanded. "Who is slain? Not the *other* duke? Boy, tell me not Alessandro——"

"He was stabbed to death by Lorenzo de' Medici and a bravo called the Scoronconcolo," said Cosimo sternly, "at the house of Ugo Ginori, last night. Lorenzo was bound; the bravo, keeping an appointment there, liberated him and together they slew the duke, who seems also to have been there. I know no more. When the news spread to me beyond the walls, I came hither, the city gates being unguarded. The people know not exactly what has passed, but they think the time auspicious for revolution. The duke's guard has disbanded and fled or joined them. There are no more on our side than these present——"

"And myself," said Arcangelo, "and those few fellows who sit their horses yonder—thy father's troop."

I had thought at this to hear Cosimo give a cry of joy, but he did not.

"Can they hold the people for this night?" he demanded like a general of fifty years. "An express has gone from the Cardinal to the duke of Ferrara, and another to the emperor. By tomorrow troops will be on the way."

It seemed to me that the noise which had come from the New Market was moving toward us.

"I will show thee can I hold them!" cried Arcangelo, dragging the young man forth by the shoulder. "Benedetto, thou art faint and tired—stay here. Cousin—your Highness, come sit beside me while I address yon civil commotion. *Basta!* This is a night!"

I sat on a bench there in the dark hall of the Vecchio and watched the two men mount and ride back to the head of the troop, which now seemed like a great black blot across half the faintly moonlit whiteness of the square. The mob was indeed advancing. At first silently, then with increasing roars as its members heartened themselves by the sound of their own voices, it swept down the street, the glare of its torches throwing a mist of light above the tops of the buildings.

"*Popolo e liberta! Popolo e liberta!*" The yells were maniacal.

Suddenly with an increase of volume as if a vast door had been opened, the front ranks of the advance turned the corner. And as for a moment their yells died down in surprize at the sight of the armed men before them, Arcangelo's voice rang out—

"Draw swords!"

There was a long rattle of scabbards.

The yelling of the mob broke out—but very differently. Those behind in the street, out of sight of the cavalry, were still shouting their cry of liberty and howling for an advance, but those in front were praying loudly or screaming with terror and trying to fight their way back to the rear. There was perhaps a minute of this confusion and then Arcangelo spoke again—this time to the mob.

"Silence!" he roared. "Silence and attention!"

Then they took time to look at him, and there arose another cry:

"The monk! The monk! The monk is not slain!"

"Nay," said Arcangelo, in a voice like a trumpet, "the monk is not slain. One only is slain, and that is the tyrant—the tyrant Alessandro—slain by his own boon companion. Friends, brethren, ye listened to me when I was defenseless and hunted in this city. Listen to me no less now that I command the Black Bands!"

There was a shivering whisper.

"The Black Bands! There stand the Black Bands!"

"And they are here for this reason," shouted Arcangelo, "to save this city from the hands of Filippo Strozzi, who even now advances on it, and to give you a leader who will keep you free. Ye are too liable, citizens, to leave your gates open o' nights; as tonight, though I have now closed them. Ye need someone to jog your memories. And so I have brought you Cosimo, son of Giovanni of the Black Bands, to be your captain!"

He took Cosimo's arm and raised it.

There was a dead silence; then one voice cried, "*Viva!*" It scattered through the crowd like fire among grains of gunpowder.

"Cheer, dogs!" roared Arcangelo. "Am I carved to mincemeat for such half-hearts? *Viva* Cosimo, Duke of Florence!"

It may have been black magic—or Black Band magic—but when his great hollow voice showed the way, there rose a shout of the same words, from a thousand throats.

And then, my bandage having some time since slipped off my head, allowing more blood than I could spare to soak my jacket, I slipped quietly off my bench, rolled against the red robe of Cardinal Cybo and knew no more.

Until I awoke, that is, on a bench of the guard-room of the Palazzo Vecchio, to find Cosimo and Arcangelo, a candelabrum and a map between them, talking strategy.

"If Strozzi is to the north—which I doubt," said Arcangelo, straightening himself, "the best place to meet him will be at Pelleta. I know that country. I will start at once with the Bands, and be first on the ground. Send after me, if it cost thee thy neck, at least a thousand men. Even so we shall be outnumbered; but we may frighten him off until the emperor can confirm thee. Didst say any of the guard has returned?"

"They are rushing back like sheep, saying that they were away merely to try to keep the populace in check," said Cosimo.

Arcangelo laughed.

"I will go and see how many can be mustered," said the new duke, striding out of the room.

As soon as he had gone, I called Arcangelo, and, smiling, he came and knelt by me.

"I can rise," I told him.

"Better not yet," he answered, pushing me back. "In a few minutes when I am gone thou must rise and take command of a score of my men I shall leave in the city. They have taken a certain fancy to thee, Benedetto. I have told the duke to make thee captain of his guard when all is settled—as it will be tomorrow. Strozzi has a greater strength, but he has not the Black Bands. Moreover he lacks men that went out a-scouting. Ha-ha!"

"And what office wilt thou have?"

Arcangelo bit his lip, then seated himself on the bench on which I lay. He folded his hands and squinted at the candles.

"Why, Benedetto," said he, "that is a matter concerning which I would speak with thee—that and another. I shall have no office, because I shall not be here. Nay—listen. If I am not slain tomorrow—which I shall not be, mistake not—I am going up through France to England and thence I intend to take ship. I have never fought on the sea and I hear there are great adventures toward the New World."

"But why?" I cried.

He turned those blue eyes upon me full.

"Benedetto," said he, "for two reasons: The first that I am curious about the ends of the earth, and the second that I have learned to dislike the gratitude of princes. I know not what fault it is in them or in me, Benedetto *mio*, but once they change plate for ermine, they come to regard me as no more than a roysterer. As I am. And I had rather royster away from the eye of authority."

He coughed. There was a clatter of hoofs as a horseman rode up to the gate of the palazzo.

"Does Cosimo know that you are going?" I asked. Arcangelo nodded.

"And what does he say?" I cried.

"He patted me on the back," said Arcangelo, "and called me cousin and said he would be sorry to lose me. But then Cardinal Cybo entered to assure him of the support of the Pope and——"

The big man got to his feet.

"That, I think, was an orderly," he began, stretching, "and——"

"There is another reason—for thy staying," I said slowly.

He stood perfectly still and looked down at me.

"Ah," he said at last and then stopped. Then sat down again. "So Girolamo visited thee in prison. There was no treachery to thee, Benedetto."

"I know it well," I told him.

One of the candles on the table guttered and went out.

"I see," he said, in a low voice, "that I must be still more candid with thee, before thou wilt let me go. What I have said of the gratitude of princes applies to that of others as well, my child, as I have found. I know not why. Sometimes I think myself a disembodied ghost, perhaps, which deceives people when I am present, but through which they see clearly when they have time to reflect."

"Women are not thus," I murmured.

"I have found them so," said Arcangelo slowly. He rose and spread out his arms.

"Benedetto, my father was a wanderer on the face of the earth. I am his son. There is an instinct in humanity which warns it not to tie affections to us, just as nature teaches lichens, they say, not to grow on stones near the brink of a slope to the sea."

In the hall without, armor rattled.

"Thou believest me not, my Benedetto," said the tall figure silhouetted against the candlelight, "but hear this. In one year, I tell thee, I shall have passed from memory. Not altogether, mind, but to this extent—that no one will remember the color of my eyebrows or my hair, or be able to see in the mind's eye my identical walk or my manner of carrying the head. And that is the only kind of remembrance for which I would exchange my right of adventure through the world. I have such a memory of a woman. Argue with me not, I pray thee, little comrade. I go to the business for which I am adapted, even as thou art for fathering children, and wearing, at last, perhaps a senator's robe."

There was a knock on the door.

"Enter!" cried Arcangelo.

The grizzled man who carried the black gonfalon appeared and saluted.

"Dawn, *signor capitan*," he said quietly.

"I am ready," said Arcangelo.

He took my hand and shook it hard.

"Good-by, Benedetto," he said slowly, not sadly, but as it were with a laugh behind his words, "together we have driven the fat shopkeepers out of the high places. If ever they return, maybe we shall meet again. Meanwhile, I commit to thee my cats. Roberto, the black one, has a sore ear—And for that other matter—be patient—wait—for the memory of me fleeteth, as I have told thee, faster than if it were a shadow."

What was there in this matter for weeping? I do not know, yet I could not speak.

Arcangelo went to the door, stood there a moment, tall and darker gray against the pearl-gray of the mist without, and waved.

"Good-by!" he said again.

The bridles jingled, and a held horse pawed the stones.

DUKE COSIMO has indeed forgotten. It is to be seen in the lines which have formed under his mouth and eyes; it was to be heard in his voice when after the battle of Montemurlo he condemned Filippo Strozzi to death and when he issued orders that Lorenzo de' Medici should be followed in his flight to Venice and assassinated. A man who can not forget an injury, I think, will rarely remember a favor. And beside, the duke has been busy working out the theories of that Niccolo Machiavelli, trying to bring city after city under his sway. Why should he ponder on how he gained Florence?

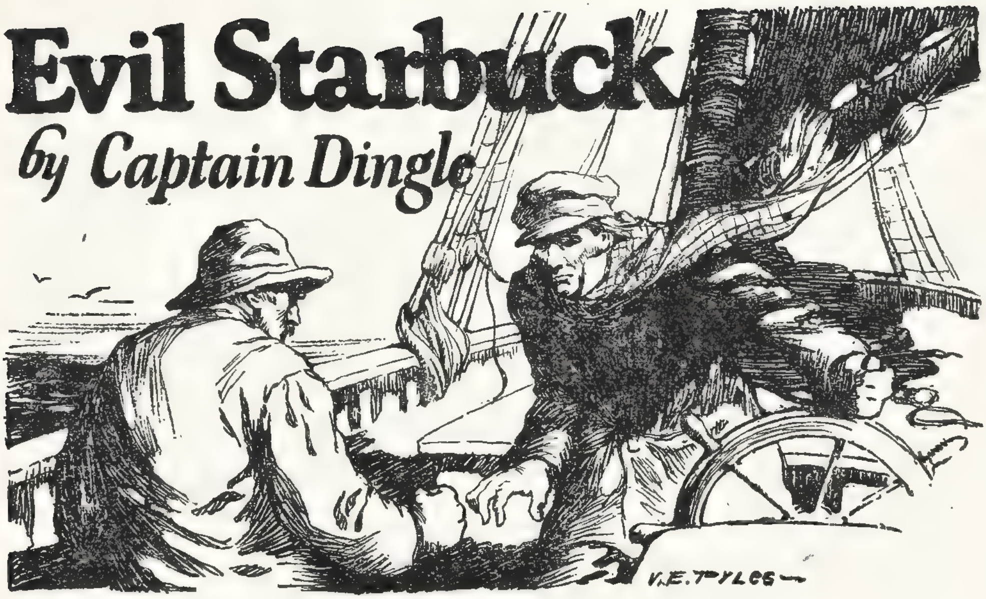
But—though I am now indeed a senator, as Arcangelo foretold—have I forgotten?

As for Allegra Ginori—

She has been my wife these ten years, and borne me two sons. Yet sometimes, as when some young captain swaggers in to seek my favor, that he may throw his life away for something that shall not profit him in the least—there is that in her eyes which makes me think that she, too, remembers.

Evil Starbuck

by Captain Dingle



Author of "Joe Monkeyface," "A Shot at a Venture," etc.

LONG before the sealing-schooner *Venture* sunk the flat head of Table Mountain below the horizon her seasoned old hands smelled trouble. Trouble in the ordinary way of the sea they would never have noticed—otherwise they would not be in such a business—but this was trouble born of swift realization that the new skipper and owner looked as if he would live up to his given name.

"Evil" Starbuck had been fired from the command of a big steamer in the Colonial trade for half-murdering a passenger who had thought to discern lightness or jest in the order to keep off the bridge. Whether he had been dubbed Evil before that or not his sealing crew did not know; but that was the name the old owner had given to them when he came down to inform them that their long association was ended; that Starbuck had bought the *Venture* and was bound sealing.

"Got off with a short sentence, he did, because of influence," the old owner had said. "Didn't want to sell, particular, I didn't, but, Gosh! Them eyes of his just naturally seemed to say I must, and I did. Good luck, boys, and a fat trip."

John Larsen, the "Squarehead" they called him, had been the ruling spirit of the schooner for a long while; he had kept the crew within the limits of hard work and tolerable order for the old skipper; and few men cared to tackle him a second time when it came to physical opposition. It was contrary to nature that the Squarehead should meekly accept his old skipper's estimate of the new skipper's masterfulness on mere say-so, and while beating out of Table Bay he had questioned Starbuck's order, and given a mighty short answer to the retort. Then he had seen for himself. Starbuck's eyes fixed him like points of black ice, yet actually seemed to burn him, and he turned away to mutter to his mates of the Evil Eye, obeying the order without further question.

But that was a condition not likely to last. John Larsen was no bully, no blatant blowhard, but he could handle himself a bit, was inclined to assume leadership, and in fact had done duty as mate of the schooner for years. The sealing was done on shares, no man drew pay, and there was never a shipped mate. Starbuck apparently had accepted the old rule without quibble, perhaps without knowing or caring which of the mossy-chested, gnarled-fingered shellbacks of his crew acted as mate.

The inevitable showdown came when the Squarehead went aft to relieve Starbuck for his supper. The cook had been seen carrying the dishes along to the little cabin, and

John simply followed the custom of the sealers. No regular watch was set, nor ever was; the crew chose their own times for wheel and lookout, and only the two remained on deck, unless emergency called for all hands, and then no skipper could want a better, readier crew.

"Where's the watch?" snapped Starbuck.

"Don't keep no vatch," John answered, reaching for the spokes. "Vat's der coorse? Supper's ready."

Starbuck's black eyes glittered and his strong face went white. With an obvious effort he retained hold of the wheel.

"You'll keep a watch now! And you'll address me as 'sir.' The watch will work, too, as other ships' watches work. You hold the wheel. I'll ferret the rats out! Course is full-and-bye."

"Full-an'-bye," repeated John, and took the spokes with a black scowl.

"Full-and-bye, what?"

Starbuck's voice was cold, like his eyes.

"Full-an'-bye, and to —— vit liner tricks in a sealer!"

John let-go the wheel, backing away, for a devil had leaped into Starbuck's face. The crew were already at supper, the cook was waiting in the cabin to serve the skipper. The deck was bare; and a cold, resistless devil grew before the Squarehead's widening gaze until it seemed to fill the spaces and leave not one inch for him.

Desperately John struck out at that cold, evil face. The blow landed hard, but left not one colorful spot on the pallid skin. The next moment Starbuck's arms were around John, the rail was at his back, and the breath was being remorselessly pressed from him. With a terrific effort John got arm free, and rained punches upon the menacing face; but a hand as steely-strong as his two together gripped his wrist, bent it back, and slowly, pitilessly bore it against a belaying pin until the bone cracked.

Not one word had Starbuck uttered during the fight. Now that his mate was definitely out of action with a broken arm, he stepped to the cabin slide, called up the steward, and curtly told him to take the helm.

One swift look of the astonished steward at that cold white face sufficed; he steered; and the skipper forced John below and set and bandaged his arm. When the sling was adjusted, he poured a half-tumbler of rum and made John swallow it, then shoved him on deck to stand his watch until relieved for supper.

Men who steered that first night out while the skipper was on deck—and that was nearly all night—doubted John's yarn. Evil Starbuck, they reported, far from being the raging demon charged, was a quiet, gloomy, nervous man who scarcely uttered a word above a murmur.

"Whoy, he sent me to git him some corfee at four bells in the middle watch," said the youngest hand at breakfast, "and did he bite me? He did not. He said, 'Thankee, old chap,' just like that, and told me to git some for myself. Devil? Huh!"

"Den dis proken arm is 'Huh!' too, hey?" grunted John.

AS THE *Venture* drew south across the roaring forties, bound for the Islands—Kerguelen Land, Crozets, Heard, Marion—the colder weather hindered the recovery of John's broken arm seriously, and no doctor could have been more assiduous than the skipper in his attentions to it. On the other hand, Starbuck allowed John no laying-up; he made him stand his watch.

The sealers grew careless in their attitude toward the skipper, and one, who had seen Starbuck only in one of his quiet, moody moments, ventured over the border of discretion. Evil Starbuck hit him once, but not before the seaman had laid hand to knife in foolish defiance. He was buried the same day, and the schooner plunged along with brooding terror forward and a moody, ferocious, secretly penitent demon aft.

Once sealing began, however, the schooner took on an almost cheery aspect, for Starbuck either was a wizard at finding the seals, or enjoyed more than human luck. Wherever he touched, at whatever desolate pinnacle of rock he hove-to to send in the boats, fur seals, fat seals swarmed; and in half the time ever taken before, the *Venture* had made sure of expenses. Even the Squarehead, his arm healed at last, found heart to meet Starbuck's more boisterous mood when they left Marion Island and boomed down their easting for the Crozets.

"Dis ain't der forst time sealing, I betcha, cap'n," he growled with a grin.

Starbuck was in a more than mellow mood, for he had called the Squarehead from the deck, leaving the ship to the helmsman, to get a drink. The little cabin reeked with tobacco and damp wood smoke; the bogie stove was getting red-hot, and wet clothes and rum together with two sorts of smoke bred an atmosphere that called for brazen lungs.

Starbuck laughed noisily, filling his own glass again and passing the bottle.

"Sealing?" he echoed. "I went sealing once before. Couldn't get a crew to sail with me after the once."

He drained his glass, a full noggin of stout liquor, without the flicker of an eye, and suddenly stared full into the Squarehead's red face.

"Why are sealers so —— soft?" he demanded.

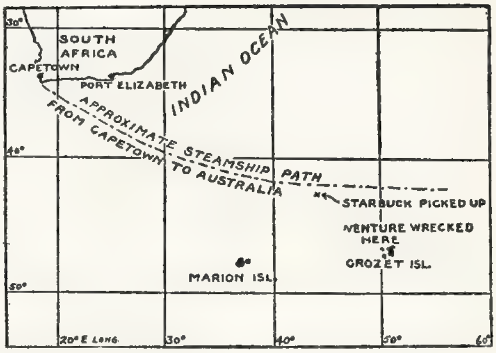
His mouth smiled still, but the devil lurked in his eyes. John gulped his rum and moved uneasily, glancing up through the skylight. Starbuck rattled on:

"I hit one chap. You dumped him overboard in his hammock. You're about the toughest of the lot, and I could—twist your head off—like that!"

As he uttered the words deliberately, he took the bottle in one hand, and with the other broke the neck clean off. As he tossed the fragments, gushing liquor, into a corner he laughed again, and the Squarehead muttered something about watch, and went on deck.

Before the Crozets were sighted, in the midst of a whirling blizzard of ice-hard snow, all hands aboard the *Venture* were assured that the devil sailed the ship, and that it was better to keep the devil in a good humor than to face him in evil mood. So never a man ventured to irk him by word or act, though if —— was aft there was building up a volcano forward, a silent, sullen volcano of wrath.

Those were bitter days. Gray seas swept down from the west, traveling sheer around the world with a howling gale behind them that never let up. The little schooner flew before them like a startled wild creature, her decks a tottering plane of frozen snow and ice until the Father of Seas overtook her and pooped her, cleaning her down and teaching hard men harder blasphemies. And through it all, through bitter gales and battering seas, through bleak discomfort below and dire peril on deck, Evil Starbuck towered above the rest in high courage and sheer hardihood as his main-truck towered above him.



Not that the sealers were as soft as he had charged. Every man of them was a he-man, a sailor, and as hard as a hard life could make them. Old Charlie Olson, full sixty years old, never asked a favor of the youngest in either sailorizing or sealing; the weather was not brewed, the sea-lion or shark bred, that old Charlie would hesitate to face if need arose; and even if the others had not been the men they were, sheer shame would have forced them to the top of human endurance so long as Old Charlie growled and carried on.

Rather was it that Starbuck held within his big frame the elements of more than man. Whatever was the impelling force that gave him his super-strength, whether pure savagery, ungovernable temper, sense of wrong, grudge against the human race, it was certain that at such times when the mood was upon him he was as unsafe to cross as a whelping tigress. At other times, in other moods, some nurses might have trusted their infants to him.

The Crozets atoned for much bad weather by producing seals in numbers that speedily turned the barren rocks into a shambles, the men into red-smeared butchers, and the *Venture* into a rich storehouse of pelts. Men had but to walk across an islet from side to side with clubs to kill beasts enough to keep them two full days of full watches skinning them. And the tremendous figure of Evil Starbuck was foremost of the killers.

Stalking through the defenseless seals like a destroying demon he seemed to take a bestial delight in sheer killing. When he took up a skinning knife and joined the crew in the necessary work of flaying, he assumed the greasiest, bloodiest task of all: the disemboweling and cutting up of the carcasses for blubber to try out into oil.

It kept him peaceable toward the men, and work never went on more smoothly. Then came Hog Island, with the killing of the last seal in sight, and when the pelts were taken on board Starbuck had all hands below re-stowing the precious cargo. It had been stowed well at first; when Starbuck had finished with it there was room for almost as many more pelts.

"But ve haf to go in for stores, anyhow," remarked the Squarehead in the cabin over grog.

The crew were celebrating the end of the hunt with cans of hot rum and water forward, also in the full expectation that the Cape would be their objective when the anchor was raised.

Evil Starbuck fixed his black, scintillating eyes on John, and they sent a shiver through the Squarehead's frame though the lips below the cold eyes and predatory nose were smiling.

"When we go in we shall be a full ship," he said, and shoved the bottle over for John to fill up.

"Ay t'ought we had a full ship now. Ay nefer took in a better vun," said John.

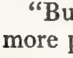
Starbuck only laughed shortly, finished his grog and turned in. John went on deck and joined in a general gab-fest over the quick full trip.

"But ve ain't goin' in. Ve're goin' after more pelts," he grumbled. "Der Evil Eye yoost told me so."

"Don't you be so crazy as to beliefe that," put in old Charlie, rendered loquacious by the warming grog. "I look in the storeroom before supper, and she's almost cleaned to the bare floor. We got to go in, for stores."

"Ay told him dot," retorted John. "He said, ven ve go in it shall be vit a full ship, py Kolly!"

"Sure. Ain't we a full ship now? Evil Starbuck was trying to get your goat, Squarehead, so's he could have a excuse to hammer you. He ain't hit a man for weeks now. Somebody's due for a busted arm, or a broken neck, or some other little joke. Go get your head down, and sleep. All aboard for Cape Town and the girls in the morning."



BUT it was not Cape Town in the morning. Starbuck was on deck before the first chill gray of dawn, gazing moodily at a terrific sea sweeping past which promised a full amount of trouble beating clear of the anchorage; but a glance at the barometer gave him hope for a moderation of the weather, and there was yet work to do.

"Four of you come with me," he ordered, when the boat was brought alongside after breakfast.

On Hog Island a thoughtful Government kept a shelter hut stocked with blankets, clothes, and food, sealed against depredatory creatures, a life-saving refuge for any castaway unfortunate enough to need them. There are many such shelters on desolate islands, and except for the occasional borrowing of a stored boat by some boat-bereft whaler no seaman would dream of violating the cache which any one of any crew might yet come to need.

"Here's stores," said Evil Starbuck, and flung open the door of the hut with a harsh laugh. "Get busy. Don't want to hang about here all day."

"Ain't going to rob the shipwreck vittles, are ye, cap'n?" ventured Old Charlie bravely.

"You talking to me?" snarled Starbuck, flashing around with fury.

"Yes, I talk to you, cap'n. It's dirty robbery to take these stores, and I stand to that for all your size!"

Grinning balefully, Starbuck slowly reached out to grip the old sealer by the throat; but even a beaten crew might put up another fight in defense of an old man so well liked as Old Charlie—and these men were by no means beaten yet. With one impulse the three other sealers of the boat's crew closed in between and boldly faced the white faced Starbuck.

"Hit one hit the lot, Starbuck!" growled the foremost.

For a second murder hovered nigh; then Evil Starbuck uttered that devil's laugh of his and swung away from them, entering the store hut.

"Get these things in the boat," he ordered, shoving out a barrel of pork with his foot. "I'll attend to you when we get clear. I'm not stealing, I'm borrowing. Get a move on, unless you want to be left here to try out the value of this hut as a shelter."

With the alternative before them, which they fully believed Starbuck capable of carrying out, the scruples of all but Old Charlie proved too slight to hinder them obeying. They might flare up into sudden protest when an old shipmate was threatened;

but after all they had learned to fear Evil Starbuck, and now the heat of the moment had passed they felt none too safe with regard to the aftermath.

Thus the boat came to be loaded in record time, in spite of Old Charlie's grim persistence in laying hands to no part of it, and by noon the schooner was beating out to gain an offing for her tempestuous run further east to Kerguelen Land.

Once clear of the land, Starbuck kept to the cabin, and the Squarehead whispered the word along that the Evil Eye was closed, that the Evil head was bowed, that Evil Starbuck was not so cocky as usual.

"Maybe he feels scared now he got der stores avay," said John.

"He ought to!" retorted one of the morning's boat crew viciously. "If there was half a dozen men in this schooner as was real men, they'd git aft and put that thievin' murderer in the place he belongs."

"Who's to take first crack?" derided another, who had felt the weight of Starbuck's anger early on in the voyage.

"Blast ye, I would, if the rest o' ye wasn't jellyfish!" howled the boatman. "Didn't he pipe down like a blessed yaller-belly when we tackled him this morning? Didn't he, Charlie?"

"He sure did—but I ain't hankering none to go see if he's staying piped down, feller."

"Take my tip, und leafe him alone," advised the Squarehead, sententiously. "He sits down dere vit his head in his hands, und his face all frownin' und drawed up like it vos mit defils gnawin' at his guts, und for vun I vouldn't efen ask him not'ing about der coorse."

John went back to his watch; but there were hotter spirits forward who considered that the proper time to set Evil Starbuck in his right and proper place was when he was bowed down in trouble, whether mental, or physical, from whatever cause. So after midnight, when wheel and lookout were posted and none might know who else was about, when the Squarehead had gone to his bunk in the run and was stewing in the stifling heat of closed bunk-slide and heaped blankets, four muffled figures emerged from the forecastle scuttle and crept aft.

The schooner soared and swooped forward in a black night rendered doubly dark by flurries of hail and bitter rain, running ahead of the tremendous seas to the sturdy pull of a double-reefed foresail and staysail, and the decks were visible only in the glistening of the sluicing seas. Boats and gear made shadows blacker than the night, and the four men reached the cabin companionway like four phantoms of the darkest shades.

A dim light burned in the cuddy over the table; the snoring of the steward on the port side forward battled for supremacy with the rusty nasal song of the Squarehead aft in the starboard run; Starbuck's door was shut, and no glimmer of light came through the glass fanlight ventilator over the door. Stealthily they opened the door; with needless caution, since the entire fabric of the vessel squealed under the strain of her driving, the leader entered, hooking back the door silently.

The others crept after him, and they stood swaying in the middle of the tiny cabin, peering fearfully into the black void which they knew held the man they feared for all their show of hardihood. The bravest heart there pumped fiercely, sending suffocating blood to a brain not too well equipped to deal with it. The last man to enter gasped in his stress, then a cold, colorless voice spat out at them from the blackness—

"Don't stand against a light when you seek to knife a sleeping man!"

A pistol shot blazed out, another, and another; four men stumbled and turned to the dim cuddy light, flying like frightened hares away from the sulfurous reek of powder smoke and the devilish presence of Evil Starbuck.

And in dire terror three men who had suffered bullet smarts bound up their wounds in secret and suffered in silence, lest their hurts bring them directly to the notice of the man they owed them to and bring direr penalties still. The Squarehead, awakened by the shots, found a crew of dumb, know-nothing sailors; he dared not ask Starbuck. And Starbuck, when he came on deck the next day, troubled to ask no questions, but met every man's gaze with that serpentine, cold, mirthless eye, smiled with his lips, and waited for the cold and bitterness of Kerguelen seas to develop those wounds into unconcealable evidence against his assailants.

AS THE leagues slipped astern with the wake Starbuck had his dark, moody days more frequently; he was often to be seen sitting huddled up at the cuddy table for hours on end, his head sunk into his arms, his great body quivering in the throes of some tremendous agony; but no man thought of making another attempt upon his captaincy. Between these periods he was masterful as ever, coldly cruel or boisterously congenial, bad to cross, not easy to understand, but capable and careful of the schooner's interests.

On Kerguelen he found seals again, hordes of them, and the work chased away all thoughts of reprisal or mutiny. One after another three sealers developed painful sores in arms or bodies which they tried vainly to doctor with seal-fat; one after another the bitter brine and frost defeated such treatment, and the sufferers had to go to Starbuck. He evinced kindly concern, but no uncomfortable curiosity, regarding the source of the sores, though his compelling eyes and coldly smiling mouth made his patients cringe and squirm more than his medicine-chest surgery.

Smiling and speaking soothing words, Evil Starbuck cut blue flesh away with a carefully sterilized lancet; using the most powerful healing agents in his bag of tricks, he gradually closed the sores and sent the men back to work. But in one a bullet remained imbedded in the deeper tissues, to fester again soon, or to lie dormant awhile and breed direr trouble in the future.

The day speedily came when not another pelt could be steeved into the schooner, hold or cabin. Seals remained, and Starbuck glared at them hungrily, but the *Venture* lay deep in the water, there were twenty-five hundred miles of turbulent sea between Kerguelen and the Cape, all in the teeth of a westerly gale; the only alternative being a course far north to seek wind and current favorable, and warmer seas, which would double the distance.

If the ice proved to be less far northerly than usual, a handy vessel might ratch along the edge of the pack in the latitudes of short degrees, until the westerlies came fair to stand up for Agulhas; but it meant a terrific, heart-breaking, freezing thrash, and as the sealers watched Starbuck climb aloft with binoculars and scan the southern wastes of ocean, they muttered uneasily.

"He ain't fool enough to chance the ice wi' a full fare like we got!" was the general opinion.

"We ought to jib if he does," declared a rash hero.

"Then you go tell him!" retorted one of the three sealers who carried lead within them.

A spot inside his breast was beginning to burn like acid; he was realizing the utter futility of anybody human thwarting Evil Starbuck.

Starbuck came down by way of a backstay.

"All right," he said to the Squarehead. "Tuck two reefs into the mains'l, single-reef the fores'l, and bend the small jib."

He went below, wearing the expression of a tortured devil, and men worked silently, none daring to speak above a mutter at their work.

The Squarehead went to report all ready for sea, and found the skipper hunched up in his tiny cabin, with his elbows on the chart table, his head gripped fiercely in both hands, a tumbler beside him, and an all-pervading reek of rum in the thick air.

"Get to —— on deck and sail the ship!" rasped Starbuck, never looking up.

"Vich coorse you take, den?" growled the Squarehead.

He had entered the cabin fully resolved to have an argument about that.

"South 'till you sight the ice!" was the curt retort.

John went up quickly, obeyed without further question, and felt strangely glad that he had not argued the point.

Into a screaming squall of flying ice-drops the schooner plunged as soon as the lee of Kerguelen was left, and in a whirling chaos of thundering gray seas and blinding snow flurries she stormed south until her lee side was perilously ice-laden and her weather rigging was a solid wall of frozen snow. Seas tumbled athwart her waist as she settled deeper under her added burden; the bogie stoves in forecastle and cabin failed to combat the piercing bitterness of the wet cold, and the galley was the one snug refuge remaining when Starbuck at last staggered on deck, flushed and hard-eyed to take an observation. Not often was sun or star visible in those fierce days of tempest and blinding snow; from the first clear sight, and the first unobstructed horizon, the skipper had to secure his position, and almost coincident with his stepping back into the companionway to work up the observation the lookout forward bawled—

"Big field of ice ahead!"

Starbuck uttered no word until he had

worked up his position. Long experience in big steamers had given him expertness in keen navigation; utilizing all the most modern methods, he was easily able to prepare his calculations almost to the point where the addition of his corrected altitude gave him the sought result. It was longitude he wanted now, for his latitude was reasonably sure; and in five minutes he was on deck again.

"Let her come about, now," he said, quietly. "Give her a good full, and call me when the Crozets come in sight. Need not worry for three days, though."

MEN chopped away tons of ice with axes as the schooner thrashed north. Starbuck kept his cabin as he had never done previously, and the cook, who took him food, grew more and more frightened as the days went by and Starbuck scarcely moved out of his chair but sat, rum bottle at hand, with a face contorted in evil passion or horrible pain.

The Squarehead reported the ship's distance each noon, was answered with an oath or an invitation to drink, he was never certain which to expect, and resumed his vigil on deck, never doubting that Starbuck was possessed of the devil.

"He don't do no navigatin'," he grumbled to the helmsman; "but der plessed track iss on der chart efery time I go down! Vunder vill he come up ven der Crozets iss sighted?"

"Shouldn't wonder if we never sighted 'em!" retorted the helmsman. "Here's one lad as'll clap hisself on the back and shake hands with hisself the day he steps ashore, anywhere! I've sailed wi' a few hard cases, but——"

The "but" was expressive. It was nearing the end of the third day since the schooner tacked, and the gray seas had been hidden most of the daylight hours under hurtling squalls of low-lying snow flurries. Anxious sealers voluntarily stood double lookouts, growing the more anxious because the man they all feared remained invisible. Fear him they did, to a man; but those who feared or hated him most fiercely dared not deny that they conceded him the mastership as man and seaman. Every hour as they peered ahead for sight of the land, they expected to see his cold, devilish face thrust out through the companionway to look around.

He appeared at last, at the very termination of three full days, in the culminating violence of a blinding succession of fog-wreathed snow squalls that had blotted out the sky, sea, and horizon for a full watch.

"Where's the lookout?" he shouted, furiously, staring aloft.

"Three men for'ard, sir," the helmsman told him hurriedly.

"For'ard! Here, get aloft with you! How in —— d'ye expect to see through that?"

He shoved the man away from the wheel, took it himself, and flung a hand around in general at the blinding atmosphere.

"Send the Squarehead along here!" he yelled.

And then, with a choking gasp, he glared broad over the lee bow, spun the wheel with all his strength, and glared again in unbelief.

"Let go all head-sheets!" he yelled.

He himself left the helm and put his tremendous strength to the main-sheet, hauling in flat the heavy main-boom which taxed the power of a full watch ordinarily. It was all to no avail. That which he only thought he saw through the leeward murk, and hoped he did not see, was in truth land. Before the head-sheets could be raised, while the schooner was yet sweeping up into the wind, she struck, hard, ran on after a staggering halt, struck again with a splintering crash, and tore the forefoot from herself and began to fill right under the loom of a frowning precipice of black rock.

"Hog Island!" yelled Starbuck, and leaped to the maindeck and fell upon the boat gripes. "Come here, you bats! Waited for me to find the land, did you? Well, you've about sailed your last traverse now!"

Out of the south arose a giant comber that rolled the schooner higher up the rock that she had split upon. Her bilge gave way with a sickening smash; the sea took charge, swept her decks, took boat, men, galley, and masts with it, and retired victor, bayed with struggling men, streaking ropes, and murderous wreckage that came back time and time again to batter at the heads of half-frozen swimmers.

Starbuck was hurled against a corner of a hatch, which, flung wide, had become wedged in the rocks. A seaman gripped the wood beside him, and was recognized. Starbuck kicked him away with a curse.

"Get out and drown, blast you! 'Twas you who put us in ——!"

The man struggled back, strangling and desperate, fumbling at belt for his sheath-knife. But Starbuck was no longer there to oppose him; he had seen, fifty fathoms away, the only remaining boat that floated at all, battered badly, but still preserving the shape and the possibilities of a boat. He struck out for it, grasped the broken gunwale, and pulled himself panting from the icy seas to seek for help.

"Bear a hand here!" he shrieked.

His voice was diminished to a feeble pipe against the howling and crashing of wind and sea. He could see little black dots crawling about the lower rocks like seals, and knew they were men; yet none gave him notice. They poked and prodded among wreckage, hauling out shipmates, clearing away raffle to make room for spent swimmers, but not one looked toward the swamped boat and the battling man clinging to it.

Evil Starbuck gritted his teeth and swam as he never swam before, urging the smashed boat before him, guiding it around to the lee side of the rocky pinnacle, gasping agonizingly, thrashed and battered himself by floating débris, but never once swerving aside from his course. And he won. He steered his forlorn wreck of a boat into a rocky crevice where the water lay almost placid, and gave his tortured body and lungs two minutes rest before hauling it up into safety.

Then he worked his way around to the scene of the schooner's crash, and stumbled in among his surviving men who crouched for shelter wherever the rocks gave lee, cursing among themselves with the intensity of despair. At sight of him they joined their forces and cursed him with bitter hate. His expression gave no clue to his inner feelings; his eye was as coldly glittering, his lips as coldly smiling, his face as deathly white as ever; and he stepped down to the sea, opposite to the disintegrating wreck, with a curt remark that, strangely, seemed not to be an order.

"Better get busy on salvage if you expect to live here. There's no food in the refuge hut, and won't be any in the wreck in half an hour."

"Der ain't no salvage!" howled the Squarehead. "You've murdered all hands wit' yer dirty thievin', may God paralyze yuh!"

Starbuck gave him one piercing look, then plunged headlong through a breaking sea and fought his way out to the wreck. Two sealers tried to follow him, for they had realized the truth of his warning. They were flung back, bruised and beaten. Old Charlie saw Starbuck climb over the skeleton-like derelict, and lower himself daringly through the broken hatch.

"He's game, whatever else he is, and I'm with him!" the old sealer shouted, and took the plunge with splendid courage that shamed the Squarehead into emulation.

Together they battled side by side, were flung back, tried again, and won through, to be hauled aboard by Starbuck himself on the line to which he had already lashed a case of provisions and a breaker of water. As they joined him, they saw that his face was laid open to the cheekbone, that his hair was a plaster of blood and brine, that his black eyes blazed with terrific pain.

"Good lads!" he muttered as they crawled shiveringly over the tottering frames. "Help me with these barrels. Better cut the mains'l adrift, too. It'll serve for a shelter. Maybe we can patch the boat with it, too."

Silently the two men obeyed him, only exchanging a glance of mute wonder at the amazing quietness of the man. He had lashed his salvage around with the long main-sheet, which he recovered from the maw of the sea by swimming out and cutting it from the tangle. Every few minutes a bale of the hard-won skins would wash out, roll down the sloping decks, and slosh into the water. Other objects went, too; and some were mercilessly ripped to pieces by the jagged rocks, some found secure hold, others went seaward on the roaring backwash.

"See? There's only one chance," Starbuck shouted, as a bale of sealskins was torn open, scattered, and the skins cut to ribbons. "What get's ashore has to be snatched up at once, or it's lost. Give me that broken boom, Charlie."

With the boom as a float, the line was let go shoreward, and the Squarehead howled to the cowering castaways to catch hold. The wind sent his raucous bellow like a shot against the rock, and two men detached themselves from the rest and ventured to the sea margin. As soon as they had reached the line, Starbuck shoved his bundle down to the shattered bulwarks.

"Over you go, and grab the line!" he snapped, pushing old Charlie and the

Squarehead after the bundle. "I'll look after the water breaker."

The breaker was bad to pack, and he had taken it out of the bundle. Watching the others as they won shorewards to the pull of the line, he watched also for an incoming comber of less malignity than some, then took the water cask with him and leaped overboard.

As he leaped, the innocent-looking comber lifted the wreck slightly, passed under and dropped it in a scattered litter of driftwood, and overtook him as he seized the cask and straightened it out toward the rocks. He felt the subtle pull of the undertow, and fought to face the incoming comber. It picked him up, with the cask, tossed both over and over, and hurled them in different directions against the bared teeth of the lower rocks. Starbuck felt himself lapsing into oblivion. Dimly he heard men shouting, some cursing, some advocating that he be left to his deserved fate.

As he battled stubbornly to recover the water cask before sleep overtook him, the dripping figure of Old Charlie came into his line of vision, clambering painfully down to lend him a hand. He summoned all his remaining vitality, rolled the cask to Charlie's reaching hands, and clawed himself clear of the sea as something seemed to explode inside his head and he lost consciousness.

It was only for a matter of seconds, for when he came around Old Charlie was still rolling the cask up the ragged slopes, and the Squarehead was sliding down to help him. With the total destruction of the schooner, the men had sought snugger quarters, and with the stores Starbuck had sent ashore were already halfway across the island to the hut. Nobody appeared to give the man who had salved the means of life for them a second thought. He staggered after them, blinded by blood, trembling with weakness.

A howling blizzard drove them into the hut, and kept them inside through the night and next forenoon. Then, without consulting Starbuck, when he returned from a ramble of inspection, the hut was closed against him, a sail-shelter put up fifty yards distant, and he was told that his day of top-dog was done. The men who told him—there were two, for mutual encouragement—bawled the verdict through the unopened door, not daring to face him; and Evil Starbuck accepted the decree in meek silence, only a queer, bewildered light in his black eyes revealing the lack of comprehension that possessed him. He wondered why he was put out, and why Old Charlie had gone back on him. At noon the Squarehead brought him a dole of cold food, and a small bottle of water. The Squarehead and modesty were strangers.

"Me und old Charlie done dis," he said loudly. "Der men said to leaf you starve, 'cos you stole der stores as should keep us alife. But me und Old Charlie said, 'No.' Ve said dot all der stores ve got vos got py you, so here's der rations for vun day. Tomorrow you get der same, until it's all gone. It von't be long, neider. You done somet'ing, Starbuck, ven you stole dem stores, py Kolly!"

John's courage had barely been sufficient to carry him to the tent; as he proceeded, and Starbuck remained quiet, his pluck mounted, until he left the tent with the air of a master admonishing a deliquent underling rather than that of a seaman who had already suffered a broken arm from the evil-eyed skipper.

Old Charlie appeared next, bringing blankets.

"It's better for you here, Starbuck," he said. "The boys don't like you, and some want to leave you starve. Maybe you'd find a knife in your gizzard some night if you stopped with us."

"How much stores?" asked Starbuck.

Old Charlie felt the same amazement as John had experienced at the skipper's change of front. He, less dense than the Squarehead perhaps, suspected some subtle motive and inwardly resolved to keep a keen lookout.

"The biscuit 's spoiled," he said. "There's half a case of bully beef, one of mutton, two pieces of beef, and the water. When them's gone, there's a few rats and some rabbits. P'raps we can eat 'em raw. There ain't a match in the crowd."

Starbuck sat gazing out over the tempestuous ocean. His head and face were ghastly in the rough bandages, self-applied; his lips were bloodless, his eyes sunken.

"Look here, Charlie," he said, "I know how you all feel. I don't want to butt in on the rest. But I advise them to get busy on the boat, for it may be a year before anything heaves in sight to take us off. To save bother, can't you give me my share of the rations, and let me eke 'em out my own way?"

"I'll see what they say," Old Charlie replied, and left, pondering deeply over the suggestion, trying with all his might to discover the underlying plot contained in the request.

His mates saw nothing but cunning in it, too. In a body they went to the tent to collectively curse Starbuck. He was gone. Seeking, they found him at the boat, thoughtfully examining her and shaking his head at the hopelessness of repairs. They started to curse, as they had intended, feeling secure in a body when they saw the ghastly extent of his injuries; the utter absence of devilishness in him caused them to change their intent, and they derided him, condemned his manhood, ridiculed his seamanship, vilified his ancestors from Noah clear up to his immediate parents.

Only then did he show a flash of the old Evil Starbuck. With an incredibly swift movement he stepped up to the man who used the forbidden word, held him by the neck, smashed a fist into the obscene mouth, and flung him away, spitting out teeth and bloody saliva.

"All the rest I admit," he said simply. "Better get to work now and do something with the boat before she falls utterly to bits."

He walked from them, and none dared follow. The next day three men tried the boat. She floated in calm water with them, but would carry no more; at five fathoms beyond the eddy of absolute calm, she filled and sank under them, slowly rolling over and floating awash as they removed their weight.

"Ain't no use!" they said. "Might carry one, if he kept on bailin' and had the luck of Nick!"

Intenser frost set in that night, and the Squarehead and Old Charlie carried a proportion of the stores over to the tent. It was no spirit of agreement that prompted the sealers to do this, but rather the outspoken determination of almost every man to let Starbuck starve rather than go out of the snug semi-warmth of the closed hut to carry rations daily to the bleakly open tent. Starbuck took the rations without comment, and rolled the water-jug in a blanket to protect it from freezing.

Next morning the rocks were ice-clad, toward midday a fine drizzle came, freezing as it fell, and before night the island was a slippery, deadly trap of frozen rock. Long before the sun got high enough to melt the icy sheath, savage oaths from the hut announced that the water cask was frozen solid. Out of the door burst half a dozen scowling men, ignoring the restraint of Old Charlie's plea for fair play, led by the Squarehead himself, to demand of Starbuck his water ration, since their own was temporarily unavailable. The cask had been rolled outside to catch the sunshine, and was weeping already at the bung; but the men were thirsty. They burst into the tent, clamorous, no longer in awe of the Evil Eye of Starbuck. Then they recoiled, looked again, and stamped outside angrily.

Evil Starbuck was gone. They milled around for a moment, then stumbled across the icy land to the snug lee where the boat had been hauled up. The boat was gone. They peered seaward, vainly. That shattered boat, the boat that would not carry three men in a ripple, was gone, Starbuck was gone, and spy as they might to every quarter, the bitter gray seas rolled thunderously to the eastward before the whistling westerly gale.

"I told yuh!" yelled the Squarehead furiously. "All his simpleness vos der cunning ouf der defil! May he fry in his own grease in ——, der schwine!"

They returned to the hut, swearing in cold, measured terms. They found the watercask burst in the thawing, and all their store of water lost irrecoverably. They stood on the headland facing the north, and cursed Evil Starbuck to the end of his earthly passage, cursed his soul thereafter, and placed a curse upon his everlasting memory.

FAR out at sea a crazy boat leaped the mad seas, sailed by a madman, bailed incessantly by the same hands, kept from going utterly to pieces by sheer, torturing labor of hands and sheer, calculating subtlety of a dour seaman's brain. A pitiful stock of food was jealously wrapped in canvas; two bottles of precious water rolled in strips of a blanket were tightly lashed under thwarts; and the boat's head ever pointed northward, straight into the track of steamers and sailing-ships bound to Australia by way of the Cape of Good Hope.

Evil Starbuck looked back once, as the

sun rose, saw the topmost tip of the Crozets dip beneath the horizon, and thereafter held his gaze rigidly ahead and sailed and kept his craft afloat. His legs were cramped and frozen, his head rang with unimaginable noises, throbbed with undescribable tortures, when on the night of the third day his heavy eyelids twitched to permit his black, glittering eyes to see the starboard light of a steamer not half a mile to windward.

* * *

"WILL he pull through, Doctor?" asked the captain of the steamship two hours later. The steamer was hurrying southeast to Hog Island as fast as she could steam.

"Aye, with his luck, sir. I suppose you know who it is?"

"Starbuck, isn't it? Can't understand Starbuck bothering about men left behind on the Crozets, though. Sure it's him?"

"Certain. And he's done, single-handed, what I gather no two men of his crew dared do, tackle the sea in that broken shell of a boat to seek help. Oh, aye, sir, he chattered like a poll parrot in his crazy moments. I had to take a foot from him; 't was black; and there was a bit of old bone loose in his skull that must have been pressing on his brain for years and just recently got knocked clear by the wallop that cracked his head."

"He's got about the smelliest name of any sailor afloat," the captain remarked. "Regular fiend, I believe, in his moods. Let me see him. He'll be interested to know the Islands will be in sight at daylight."

"Aye!" retoretd the doctor. "He'll be as interested as any he-man of his caliber would be. If ever any evil was in him that wasn't caused by that bone-pressure on his brain, call me a Sassenach, sir! Evil men don't pull off a tremendous thing like that boat trip to save roughnecks' lives. Look at him!"

White-haired and haggard, Evil Starbuck could yet smile faintly at the captain bending over him.

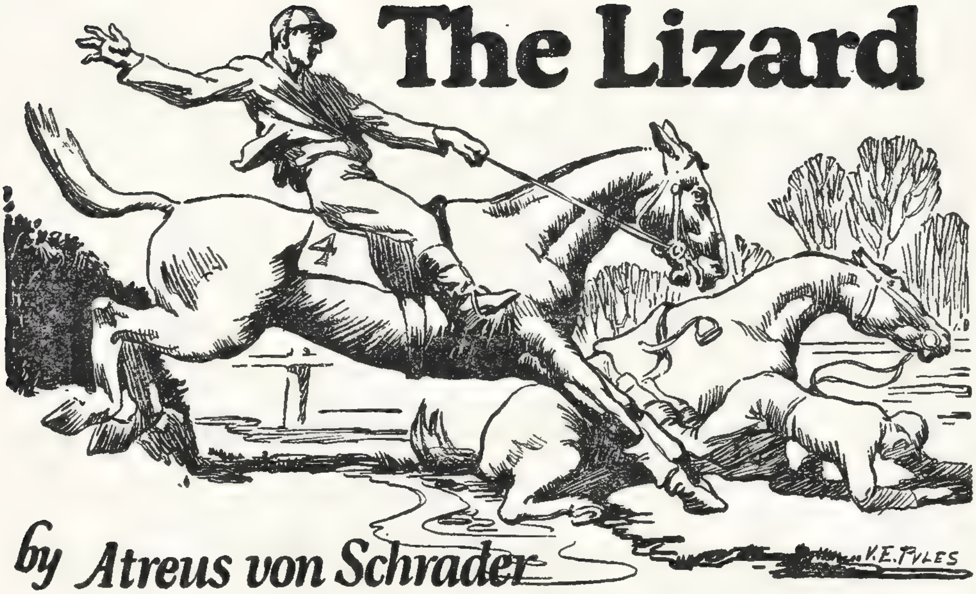
"Thanks, captain," he said, a bloodless hand fluttering to press the brown one resting on the bunk-board. "Glad you'll be in time. Poor fellows have no water, nor fire. I'd like to see Old Charlie, and the Squarehead, if they're not too mad at me. I'm awfully sleepy——"

He dozed off, and was still sleeping quietly when the steamer hove-to off Hog Island and sent her steam launch ashore, bearing stores to re-stock the hut. A group of madly capering sealers waded waist deep into the freezing sea to meet it. There was no baggage to ship, only eager men, thirsty men, half-frozen men who gabbled and chattered incessantly about the dirty scoundrel who had deserted them. The officer in charge of the launch said nothing, but passed them aboard the steamer for the captain to deal with. He listened to them patiently. They stood beside Starbuck's cabin.

"Evil Starbuck, he was called," said the Squarehead. "Und a bad *hombre*, captain. Broke my arm, he did, killed young Tom, and piled us up on that rock and den left us to starve! He vos——"

"I know," the captain interrupted shortly. "Which is Old Charlie? All right. You two go in here. Somebody wants to see you."

The Lizard



by Atreus von Schrader

Author of "The Piebald," "Mike Smears Things," etc.

THERE was a sound of smashing boards as a big bay horse hit the top panel of the whitewashed jump, blundered heavily, recovered, and was pulled to a walk by the rider on his back.

"——'s bells!"

Mike McCarthy slipped from the saddle and ran a careful hand over his mount's left knee.

"You big fool, now you'll have a lump on you like a watermelon in half an hour."

While he felt for more serious injury, another man, broad of shoulder, large of girth, red faced, with bright blue eyes, came up. He had been standing with a stop-watch at the side of the jump when Mike hit it. The big man was "Sunny Jim" Dollom, trainer and half-owner of their small string of horses.

"Sounded like he rapped good an' hard," he said; then: "You know what I think of jump-races, anyhow. Th' flat's good enough. Now we got a horse laid up again. An' you might just as well busted your own neck. What's th' use? Let's cut out th' jumpin'. Butterfly's ripe t'win tomorrow anyhow, ain't she?"

"Sure she is," answered Mike, as the two started back with the lamed horse toward the stables, "but we can't live on one horse. We're near busted now 'cause we've been tryin' t'let th' Butterfly mare do all th' work. This herrin'-gutted dog ain't worth his salt on th' track, an' sometimes you c'n make a first-class steeplechaser out of almost nothin'."

"Yep! An' sometimes you c'n make almost nothin' shootin' at jump races," retorted Sunny Jim as they reached the paddock. "Put him up an' we'll let Snowball spray that knee an' put a poultice on it. One more cripple t'eat his head off."

"This bump ain't goin' t'lay him up long. An' while th' purses in jump-races don't amount t'much, you c'n get a nice bet down. Havin' a ace in th' hole don't do any harm," answered Mike as he turned the bay over to Snowball, their colored stableboy.

"Right now it's us in th' hole. Old man Waters been after me again f'r his feed bill. Sore as a crab, an' says he's goin' to attach th' string if he ain't paid by day after tomorrow."

"Fine chance he's got t'do that! With Butterfly runnin' tomorrow? Huh! How much does he want?" asked Mike.

"Near six hundred dollars. It's been runnin' some time. I wouldn't wonder if he'd rather have th' mare than th' money, bein' right thick with 'Sell-you-Lloyd,' an' knowin' Lloyd's tried to buy her," said Dollom.

"Six hundred. Whew! I didn't know we owed him that much. I been all swelled up over havin' a lonesome century-note in my jeans," he paused and drew out the crumpled bill; "well, that's th' whole works, an' it goes on th' mare t'morrow. She's goin' t'come home in a walk. Don't you fret about that!"

THE late afternoon sun threw long shadows against the whitewashed stalls of Irish Row, that part of the Fairview stables occupied by small owners and trainers. Sunny Jim Dollom, seated on a bale of hay, his broad, black hat tipped over his eyes, meditated on the subject of ways and means. For he and Mike were about at the end of their rope, and he knew the futility of counting on races until they were won.

If Butterfly failed, things would be very bad indeed. From time to time he pulled out a blade of timothy and chewed it. Any one observing him would have noted that no watch-chain adorned his wide vest, and a white band, in sharp contrast to the sun-burned skin on either side of the fourth finger of his left hand hinted at the recent removal of a ring. The partners were on thin ice.

As he sat there, a double patter of hooves broke in upon his thoughts. Dollom straightened the hat on his head; then he looked toward the track gate. And then he rose swiftly and walked toward the far end of the long row of stalls, both hands thrust deep into his pockets.

Two horses had come in from the soft dirt road that bounded the Fairview track. One was a slender, golden-sorrel mare, silken-coated, dainty-muzzled, perfect as only a thoroughbred can be. On her back perched Mike McCarthy, burned by the sun to the color of an old saddle.

He was leading another sorrel, on which Sunny Jim fixed an unfriendly gaze. The newcomer was long in the barrel, short-legged, ewe-necked, with an eye that showed too much white, and ears that flattened too readily. Mike slid from Butterfly's back as Snowball came up to take her, and stood off at the full length of the halter-strap to look at the new horse. He had not said a word.

"Well? What is it? Somebody give it t'you?" asked Dollom.

"Nope. I bought him," Mike was obviously uncomfortable, and grinned shamefacedly.

"You bought that? You paid money f'r that hammer-headed, oat-burnin' crow-bait? An' us busted higher'n a kite?"

Sunny Jim spoke without heat.

"That's what I did," answered Mike, and went on defiantly. "You'd done th' same."

He turned to the strange horse and twitched his lead strap to make him hold up his head. Instead, the sorrel's ears flattened and he humped his long back as if expecting a blow. Mike considered him.

"He ain't much t' look at," he said, "but I'm tellin' you that's a game horse! I know. An' he was gettin' a dirty raw deal."

He jerked a stubby thumb toward the world at large outside the track grounds.

"That big swine Ned Allen had him hooked to a stone-boat. Y'know that piece of sand about a mile down th' road, this side of Allen's farm? Well, me an' Butterfly comes canterin' along an' finds th' stone-boat stuck tight. Allen is clubbin' this horse with th' butt-end of a blacksnake because he can't pull a two horse load. Just as we get there, he jerks him around so sudden he loses his footin', bein' about cooked anyhow, an' goes down hard. Does he stay down t'get his breath, or rest f'r a minute like nine horses would out of ten? He does not!

"This crock is heavin' against th' collar as soon as he gets his forefeet under him, an' he gets up pullin' all he can. He's a real horse, even if he ain't a good-looker."

Here Mike paused and rubbed the knuckles of his right hand, which were skinned and clotted with dried blood.

"I slipped off th' mare just as Allen starts his whip again. Well, we had a little argument. Th' son-of-a-gun tried t'bust me with th' whip— Anyhow, he sold me th' horse f'r a hundred——"

Here Sunny Jim broke in—

"An' you gave him th' last dollar between us an' th' little red poor-house?"

Mike nodded.

"I had to, Jim. Shucks, ain't we paid th' mare's entry-fee f'r tomorrow? Allen would a' beat him to pulp. An' I couldn't just take him an' leave."

The jockey was entirely serious.

Sunny Jim removed his hat, drew a large bandanna across his brow, and slowly shook his head.

"Mike, you an' me have been hooked up

together f'r some time, an' at that I don't know what you're goin' t' do next any more'n a guy with a bottle of home-made hooch. While I'm sittin' here tryin' t'figure out how we c'n keep goin', you're out buyin' horses. Ain't you hocked your watch? An' me mine, an' my ring? Ain't we busted flat? An' you come prancin' in with a skate that looks like a saw-horse, an' without th' last hundred dollars we got in th' world. How're we goin' to put a bet on the' mare? All we got to run for is a measley little purse. You oughtn't t'have no pockets!" said Dollom disgustedly.

"Maybe you're right," admitted Mike. "But when I see a good horse in trouble, it looks like I got t'help him out."

"Good? Good f'r what?" asked his partner.

"I don't know yet. But he's got guts, an' that's a runnin' start. He's built t' stand th' gaff, too. There's blood in this goat somewhere."

Dollom looked at the new addition to their string in silence. Then he turned and called—

"Snowball!"

Out of Butterfly's stall came the slouching, jet-black darkey, to whom Mike gave the sorrel's halter-strap.

"Yassah, boss? Looks lak' we got somethin' new?"

"Yep. Put him in th' empty stall next to th' mare," said Mike. "An' you might give him a rub before you feed him."

"I'll shine him good. This hoss he looks lak' a lizard, with his long haid, an' layin' along th' ground th' way he do. C'mon, you lizard-hoss!" chuckled Snowball.

The sorrel followed him stiffly, the dark sweat-marks on his withers and flanks showing almost black.

They saw Snowball turn him into the stall, go to the little harness-room, and return with brushes and cloths. Five seconds later there came the sound of shod hooves against wood, and the darkey flew out of the stall-door like a lemon pit squeezed between thumb and forefinger.

"Nice, friendly horse," murmured Sunny Jim as Snowball slowed up in front of them.

"Misto Dollom, mus' be somethin' 'bout me that hoss don't care about. You-all hear him lam out with his feet? I was standin' by his haid, an' he turn lak' a sho'-nuff lizard, an' *bam!*"

Snowball grinned a wide ivory grin.

"I'm a lizard, too, an' he ain't hit nothin'. But that hoss is quick. Now I ties him up!"

"Wait a minute. Lemme set him straight," said Mike.

While Sunny Jim and Snowball watched from the door of the box-stall, he went in, spoke to The Lizard (for so he came to be called) patted him on neck and shoulder until his sensitive ears quested forward and the savage eyes lost their fear, and then went over him with the big brush. Slapping the dust from his clothes, Mike came out.

"Guess he's ready to eat. So'm I. Give him a pail of water first, Smoke. He won't bother you now."

Then, though Sunny Jim had said nothing, Mike answered him:

"Guess you'd be mean too if somebody'd been bustin' you with a club an' throwin' you down f'r not doin' somethin' you couldn't do. He'll get over that."

"'Tain't this horse an' his feelin's I'm worryin' about," said Dollom. "What's frettin' me is that if we don't cash in tomorrow we're in th' soup. We're cuttin' it too thin t'make me happy."

"Me an' th' mare's got that race in our pockets. This time tomorrow we'll be feelin' like human bein's again, an' we c'n tell Waters where he gets off. There ain't nothin' on this track c'n live with th' mare when she's right, an' she's ripe as a peach," answered Mike. "Let's go an' eat. I got my appetite left, anyhow."

They were a curious pair as they walked away from Irish Row, Sunny Jim towering head and shoulders above Mike's slender hundred and twenty pounds of whipcord and whalebone, so that the little jockey strode almost two for one to keep pace with his huge partner. Down the stretch of the Fairview track they went, through the empty, shadowy grandstand, and so over the wooden railroad bridge that separated the race-course from the town.

HUNGRY men are by preference silent while eating, and there was little conversation at their boarding-house table, though it was crowded with other trainers and jockeys like themselves. Rivalry runs deep in Irish Row, where the winning or losing of one race may mean much, and trainers talk as little as possible.

Supper finished, Mike and Sunny Jim smoked silently on the porch, until Mike snapped the end of his cigaret over the rail and got up.

"Let's go an' put 'em to bed."

Dollom heaved his bulk out of his creaking rocker, and they started back for their stables to see that everything was well. The night was dark and soft as velvet as they trudged across the infield, with a great chorus of frogs from the swamp beyond the back-stretch. Neither partner spoke until the white rail of the track swung to the left at the first turn and the long row of stalls loomed before them.

"Gosh! Wouldn't it be nice not t'have t'run ourselves ragged keepin' one jump ahead of th' sheriff?" said Mike. Then, "Jim, I feel mean over buyin' us this Lizard-horse." He paused, then added—

"But I don't see how I could have done different."

Sunny Jim, huge as a bull elephant beside him, grunted:

"Don't know as I do either. Guess I know how you felt. Forget it, Mike. We'll find somethin' t'do with him."

And so was Mike forgiven.

Snowball, a darker patch against the darkness, came from Butterfly's stall as they spoke.

"That you-all?" he asked, and sighed with audible relief as he recognized them.

"Yep. What's th' matter? Seen a ghost?" asked Sunny Jim. The darkey was plainly nervous. Mike lighted a stable-lantern.

"Nossah. Ain't seen no spook. But you-all listen," he gulped. " 'Bout a hour ago I was settin' down in front of th' lady-hoss's stall, an' along comes a white man askin' me if this is where you-all keeps yo' string. Big man, onery lookin', an' kind o' mashed up in th' face. I tells him 'yessah,' an' you-all ought t'be comin' along any time. He don't say nothin'; just cusses to hisself an' goes off thataway."

Snowball pointed toward the infield and the stands.

"I dunno what he's after, but I ain't lak' his looks."

"Did this bird have a mustache like th' spray from th' track sprinklin' cart?" asked Mike, and Snowball nodded.

"Yassah. Big mustache, an' he was kinda swole up in th' face, lak' I said."

"That's Allen, sure as shootin'," said Mike, "th' guy I got th' Lizard-hoss off of. He's big an' mean-lookin', with a mustache, an' I smashed his ugly mug good after I got th' whip away from him."

He scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Hm. Looks funny, don't it? He was sore enough t'do most anythin', too. Come t' think of it, I believe I did let on th' mare was runnin' tomorrow, tellin' him after we got through that I'd have t' be goin', me not wantin' t' keep her out too long."

"Guess I'll sleep here tonight," said Sunny Jim abruptly.

"Guess not. You lemme do that. This is my battle. An' I'll sure run a fork in that man if he comes foolin' around th' stalls," answered Mike.

"Nope. You're ridin' tomorrow, an' you got t'get some sleep. What's th' use talkin'? I'll bed down in th' hay. I got my gun, an' if your friend comes along, I'll make him leave quick."

"Smoke, did you happen t' tell this cuss which stall th' mare was in?" asked Mike abruptly.

"Nossah! I ain't tell him nothin' 'ceptin' what I tell you-all."

"Let me stay, Jim. You know I c'n stay awake better'n you," began Mike.

"You go on back an' go t' bed. I'll take care of anybody comes this way," answered Dollom, taking off his coat and loosening his shoe-laces preparatory to climbing up to the little hay-loft over the stalls.

Mike reluctantly departed, and for a time Sunny Jim lay in the fragrant loft, looking at the uncountable stars in the dark sky, and hearing only the contented rustling of the horses below and the far-off cry of a whippoorwill. He dozed and nodded, caught himself, and dozed again. Then he slept.

Mike tossed restlessly on his bed in their stuffy room; he saw Butterfly, the golden-sorrel pride of their stable, attacked in the night. Half a dozen times he started up anxiously, to drop off again and dream that he was riding in the race, and that the mare was anchored to the track, while the other horses, one by one, passed him with nightmare slowness down the track. He woke with a start, to find the first hint of dawn in the east. He was nervous and wretched.

"Guess I might's well mosey over to th' track," he muttered to himself, as he slid into his clothes and crept down the stairs.

Sunny Jim, in his hay-loft, had awakened guiltily once or twice during the night; each time he heard the quiet movements of the horses. Once he made a tour of inspection with his pocket-lamp, finding everything safe. Snowball, sleeping in the harness-room adjoining the stalls, snored peacefully.

Then, through his slumber, Dollom heard a groan, and sat up, rubbing his eyes. Then, more distinctly, came a low oath almost beneath him, an angry squeal from The Lizard, and the loud crash of his hooves against his stall-side. With a swiftness out of all proportion to his bulk, Sunny Jim half-climbed, half-fell down the little ladder, his electric lamp in one hand, his pistol in the other. He made for Butterfly's stall first, flashed the lamp, and saw the sorrel mare, her delicate head drooping, her sides covered with sweat, white froth on her silken muzzle.

"My ——!"

Sunny Jim let out a bellow like all the bulls of Bashan.

"You Snowball, c'mere!" he roared. Then added—

"Hang on, lady-hoss, we'll fix you up."

He ran for the harness-room to rouse the sleeping darkey and get water and soap for a first-aid emetic.

Mike was half a mile away when he heard his partner's call for help. How fast he covered the ground, or how, he never knew. When he reached Irish Row, Sunny Jim was holding the poisoned mare's head out straight and tapping gently on her throttle to make her swallow the potent mess that Snowball was pouring into her throat from a long-necked bottle.

"Mike, somebody's been at th' mare," exclaimed Sunny Jim as he saw him enter the stall.

Mike took in the situation in a swift glance.

"Gettin' it down?" he asked quietly.

Sunny Jim nodded. This was no time for blame or comment.

"Alright. I'm goin' f'r Doc Sherard; he'll know what t' do better'n us. Keep pourin' it in. I'll take th' Lizard; if I kill him it won't make so much difference."

Day was breaking as he came from the harness-room with a saddle and bridle on his arm and entered The Lizard's stall. A second later he was at Dollom's side.

"Jim, gimme your gun. Allen's in there with th' Lizard!" he said. "He's backed in under th' manger where th' horse can't get at him. I wish he'd kicked his head off!"

Dollom passed the revolver to his partner.

"Mike, don't you make any breaks. I'd like t'shoot him too, but we can't. Bring th' swine in here an' I'll keep him 'till you get back. Th' mare comes first, an' she needs help."

"You——"

Words failed Mike as he reentered The Lizard's stall and covered the man who had wrecked their chances and harmed the mare that was their dearest possession.

"Steady, hoss! We'll tend to him later," he said, as The Lizard, his ears back flat against his long head and his eyes rolling dangerously, lifted a hind leg.

Mike patted him on the shoulder, then called out—

"Stick your dirty hands up, an' keep 'em up, or somethin'll slip!" ordered Mike. "Now you walk out, an' if he lams you on th' way by, I won't stop him."

This last he said as Allen flinched and hugged the wall. The little jockey was white with rage and anguish.

"You've hurt a mare worth a hundred like you. All I want is half a chance, an' you'll get drilled clean!" he said, and marched his captive into Butterfly's stall, where he faced him into a corner and gave the gun to Sunny Jim.

Allen had obeyed his orders without a word.

MIKE grabbed up the saddle and bridle, and a moment later led out The Lizard. The sorrel stood quiet while he clambered into the saddle; neither Sunny Jim or Snowball could leave the mare to give him a leg-up.

"I'll be back with th' vet as soon as I can. You keep givin' it to her," he said, and turned his mount toward the track gate, a wide, five-foot whitewashed barrier that loomed like a skeleton in the early morning light. Almost as he turned him, Mike swung The Lizard back again; the gate was locked, and it was too early for the track watchman. Sunny Jim, out of one eye, saw Mike settle himself in the saddle, heard him curse deep, and drive home both heels against his horse's flanks.

"If it's in you, here's your chance to show it!" said Mike, as The Lizard gathered himself, sprang forward and ran straight at the gate.

There was a rattle of pebbles, a little cloud of dust, and in a splendid leap the strange horse cleared the bars and took up his gallop down the road.

"Whew," said Sunny Jim to himself, "th' crazy terrier!"

When half an hour later Mike returned with the veterinarian, Sunny Jim was just turning the key in the big padlock on the harness-room door. Butterfly, thanks to a gallon or more of the dose poured into her, was out of danger.

"Guess you got it all," said Sherard, after examining her carefully. "Close call. Where'd she get it?"

Sunny Jim's big hand closed on Mike's arm.

"I don't know. Wish I did."

If the vet was skeptical, he was also discreet.

"Well, th' danger's past. She'll be wabbly on her pins for two or three days. Give her a wet mash about noon and let it go at that for today. I'll stop in this evening," he said, and departed on his big roan. The Lizard, after his gallop, was standing quiet, while Snowball rubbed his nose. Mike and Dollom went back to Butterfly's stall.

"Jim, looks like this puts a crimp in us, don't it?" said the jockey.

Sunny Jim did not answer, but paced up and down beside the mare, his face growing darker and darker as his rage mounted in him. It was the first time he had had to think of the outrage.

"It does," he said at length. "An' all along of that critter we got shut up in th' harness-room. By th' Great Horn Spoon, I'd like——"

"Me too," answered Mike without waiting for him to finish his thought; then, looking at his partner, and because he had once or twice before seen the big man when wrath made him berserk, Mike strove to turn the subject.

"Say, d'you see th' jump me an' th' Lizard-hoss took this mornin'?" he asked, "I didn't more'n half know what I was doin', or I wouldn't tried it, but——"

His voice trailed off at the word, and his face grew suddenly blank at the thought that came to him. For perhaps a full minute the partners stood there in silence. Then Mike held out his hand, muttering to himself, as though trying to solve a riddle.

"If he came over last evenin' when th' Smoke thought he saw him, then he's got it on him yet. Jim, gimme th' key."

Dollom handed over the key, and reached for his revolver.

"Never mind that; I licked him once, an' I c'n do it again if I have to," said Mike, and strode over to the door.

He opened the lock, swung the door wide, and spoke—

"Come out o' that, quick!"

A hulking figure obeyed him. The abuser of horses was thoroughly subdued, in spite of his villainous appearance, largely the result of Mike's efforts of the day before with his own whip-butt. Poisoning race-horses is not a minor offense, and he knew it. Further, what he saw of Sunny Jim as the big man glared at him, was not reassuring.

Mike wasted no time in preliminaries.

"Don't tell us we got th' wrong man, or that you didn't slip th' mare somethin' an' try t'give it to your own horse. We know all about that," he said; then, abruptly——

"Got that hundred dollar bill I gave you yesterday?" he asked.

Allen hesitated.

"If you say you haven't, I'm goin' t'frisk you, so you might's well tell th' truth."

"You can't take any money from me—" began their prisoner; but Mike cut him short.

"For three cents I'd take th' heart out o' you. Answer me quick, or we'll have t'help you."

And he stepped forward.

There was nothing else to be done, and Allen slowly drew a bill from his pocket and held it out.

"You take that, an' I'll——"

"You c'n tell that to th' judge. Now get back in there," and Mike pointed to the harness-room door. "We're goin' t'keep you f'r awhile," he said and again locked the man in. Mike was too angry to waste words.

Sunny Jim had watched in silence while Snowball's eyes were big with awe. Mike went to Butterfly's stall, saw that the mare was resting and out of pain, and returned to his partner.

"Jim," he said, "I got a plan. Now you listen."

For a time he talked earnestly in a low voice, so that Snowball overheard no word. Once Sunny Jim remonstrated with him: "I said yesterday you were cracked like an egg. Now I know it. What's th' use breakin' your fool neck? Ain't we in enough trouble now?"

Mike returned to the attack.

"I ain't goin' t'break any necks. An' if we don't yank ourselves out o' this hole, it might's well be broke. Butterfly can't run f'r a month, an' there's nothin' else we got c'n win a race. You say Waters's goin' t'grab th' string if we don't pay him by tomorrow. An' he'll do it. You know him, and th' gang back of him."

Sunny Jim nodded an acknowledgment of the truth of Mike's words.

"All right, then," continued the little jockey, "jumpin' don't take much 'cept horse sense, an' some ridin.' I got th' ridin'. An' you saw th' Lizard hop over a right good fence this mornin'. Nobody at th' track knows anythin' about him, so we'll get in light. He's hard as nails, if I'm any guesser at a crock's condition."

He paused for breath.

"——, Jim, it's a chance, an' we can't pass up any chances right now."

"It's a Chinaman's chance," muttered Dollom, unconvinced.

"Well, ain't that better'n none?" asked Mike. "I know th' purse ain't big. Th' Stewards puts in th' jump-races t'please th' Hunt Club sports—" here he chuckled—"but there'll be fat odds against us, an' we got that skunk's hundred dollars t'pull down a stake worth havin'."

Mike grinned broadly.

"It'd almost be a pleasure t'lose it f'r him!" he added.

So, after further argument, it was decided to enter The Lizard, ability unknown, in the Green Oak Steeplechase, set for that same afternoon. Desperate men must see opportunity invisible to others more fortunate.

"Snowball," called Mike, when Sunny Jim had reluctantly given his consent, "you keep your eyes peeled on th' harness room, an' if that bird starts anythin', you take this gun an' begin shootin' through th' door, see?"

He said it loudly, at the same time winking at the boy. Snowball saw, and answered in kind,

"Yassah, boss. I sho' would delight t'do just that!"

Mike then went to the locked door and spoke to Allen:

"Hey, you. Th' coon'll be sittin' here with a gun, an' he's excited an' liable t'shoot quick. If I was you, I'd stay quiet."

A muffled oath was the reply, and Mike turned to his partner, remarking—

"Sort of a busy mornin', an' we ain't had breakfast. Let's go."

THE Green Oak Steeplechase, at three miles, was the fourth event on the day's card. Half an hour before the race was called, a procession left Irish Row for the track paddock. Sunny Jim had entered The Lizard at the last possible moment, and the handicapper had been kind, letting the unknown in with the light impost of a hundred and thirty pounds; which meant only a little lead in Mike's weight-cloth. And deadweight is the heaviest weight a horse can carry.

First came Snowball, leading The Lizard, hooded, sheeted and bandaged within an inch of his life. Then, side by side, Sunny Jim, Allen, and Mike. A two-foot length of heavy twine bound Allen's right wrist to Dollom's, so that they walked close together. This was Sunny Jim's idea.

"We can't leave this swine in th' harness-room. He'd get out with a rusty nail. Besides, if anythin' goes wrong, I want him handy. If he peeps, I'll twist his neck."

The grandstand and lawn were black with a milling, eager crowd, in the midst of which, like a burnished button on a somber coat, a red-uniformed brass band strove in vain to make itself heard.

Four horses were entered in the Green Oak Steeplechase, all of them by the "Hunt Club sports." For the Green Tree Hunt Club was near by, and it's members were ardent admirers of jumping. Your professional horseman as a rule prefers flat-racing, as being less chancey.

Senator Clymer's big black gelding, Rufus, headed the entry list, with top-weight, and was favorite in the betting. Campbell, Clymer's stable jockey, was to ride him. Dartmoor, a weedy bay, had been entered by David Brewer, who would ride himself and so claim his amateur's weight-allowance. Third was the five-year-old chestnut, Jumping-Jack, also ridden by his owner, Warren Johnson.

The field was small, for Rufus was thought to have the race at his mercy, and few cared to enter the lists against him. Last of all came Mike and The Lizard, and against the sorrel the bookmakers posted a contemptuous 25 to 1.

Sell-you-Lloyd, Clymer's trainer, was in the paddock when the partners arrived. There was an old feud between them, and Lloyd shrewdly guessed that they would not be entering a horse that no one had seen schooling unless things were pretty bad with them.

"Well, well, well! Where'd you get th' goat?" he asked, his close-set eyes examining the sheeted Lizard.

"That ain't th' half of it!" retorted Mike. "It's th' goats we're goin' t'get you want t'watch for!"

The jockey's heart was heavy in him, so that he assumed a jauntiness he did not feel. It is the same quality that never lets a terrier know when he is licked.

"Runnin' a thing like that makes me think you might be interested in sellin' th' Butterfly mare. I'd be glad t'help you out, an' I believe I can get th' senator to take her off your hands," said Lloyd.

This, in view of the fact that he had long coveted the golden-sorrel, was received with a grin of derision from Mike. Sunny Jim, with a sudden ferocity bred of the strain of their plight, let himself go.

"You tell your crooked boss I'll cut th' mare's throat with my own hands before he gets her!" he said.

Senator Clymer's reputation was not that of Cæsar's wife, and Sell-you-Lloyd turned away with a snarl to give his riding instructions to Campbell, who had come up as they talked.

"You watch out f'r Campbell," said Sunny Jim to Mike, "he'll foul you in a minute if he gets th' chance. An' he'll hunt th' chance."

"I'll be watchin'. All I'm hopin' is that th' Lizard c'n stand up an' go three miles, an' that th' rest of 'em falls down or busts a lung," answered Mike. "Say, th' bugle will be blowin' in five minutes. You take that dog hitched t'you an' go on down an' get th' hundred dollars placed. Put it on us t'win, see? Don't split it. We're goin' t'come in first, or we won't be nowhere, an' we never needed anything like we need this bet!"

Allen, in whole-souled fear of the big man he was lashed to, had been silent as Sunny Jim's own shadow.

Dollom, his prisoner close at his side, turned and disappeared in the crowded betting-ring, to come back with the precious ticket in his pocket.

"We're on at twenty-five," he announced. "Th' rest— Mike, it's up to you an' th' Lizard now."

A moment later the bugle called the horses to the track, and Snowball, almost whimpering in his excitement, stripped the blanket and hood from the sorrel. A thorough grooming had given his coat the sheen of polished metal; they had banged his tail at the hocks, and carefully braided his mane, so that his ewe neck was less pronounced. He was not a bad-looking animal, with his deep girth and powerful short legs, and he was in good condition.

"All right, Jim. Here we go," said Mike, and lifted his left foot for help into the saddle. With all his reptilian build, The Lizard stood a good fifteen-two.

Rufus, with Campbell crouched on his withers, led the parade past the stands and was loudly applauded. After him came Brewer on Dartmoor, the weedy bay, to receive the cheers of his own particular supporters. Behind him Jumping-Jack, with the careful, creeping walk of the seasoned timber-topper. Jumping-Jack was a businesslike horse, with a horseman on his back.

Mike, amid a silence that was worse than jeers, came last. The Lizard was unheralded and unknown, and he was only an obscure jockey from Irish Row presuming to pit his mount against the flower of the Hunt Club stock.

Mike tucked his cutting whip under his right thigh and walked The Lizard up the track. As he turned to go back to the post he saw Sunny Jim, and Allen, jammed against the rail, and caught his partner's eye for a naked second.

"Lizard-hoss, we got a life-size job t'do. Let's do it right," he said, and drew his cutting-whip from beneath his leg, to grip it in his right hand.

The start of the Green Oak Steeplechase was from the chute at the head of the homestretch, thence across the track into the infield, and then three times around the course, finishing a hundred yards past the water-jump and directly in front of the grandstand.

As the horses lined up for the start, Campbell swung his big black straight across Mike's path.

"I'm goin' after these Willie-boys. Th' Senator wants this cup f'r his sideboard.

You keep out of my way, see?" he said truculently.

Before Mike could answer, The Lizard's head struck with the speed of a snake at Rufus' flank, his yellow teeth meeting with a sharp click not a foot behind Campbell's right boot. Mike grinned in the other's face.

"Guess that'll answer you!" he said. "I want this race myself. Move that pony over where he belongs, or we'll eat you up an' spit out th' pieces!"

This to Rufus, standing sixteen-one in his racing plates! Their repartee was interrupted by the voice of the starter, ordering them to get in line. And since a three-mile steeplechase is very different from a six-furlong sprint, where a foot or two at the start may make a difference, there was none of the usual jockeying and jamming to beat the barrier.

Campbell had the inside position. On his right were Mike and The Lizard; then Dartmoor, with David Brewer a little pale and trembly. On the outside, minding strictly his own business, Johnson on Jumping-Jack.

For a long breath the four stood poised, the flag fell, and they were off.

CAMPBELL, finding his stride with a rush, took Rufus into the lead, while Jumping-Jack and Dartmoor, the latter fighting for his head, spread out as they surged across the track and into the steeplechase-course. The first jump, a brush-and-board affair, lay a hundred yards ahead. Mike felt the pistonlike drive of The Lizard's strong shoulders as the sorrel galloped.

It was his plan to stay behind, letting the others make the pace, and so avoid crowding at the jumps. Any horse can clear an ordinary hurdle if he is not rattled or exhausted. The Lizard would assuredly be both before the race was over.

Rufus led the way over the first jump by half-a-dozen lengths, the other two clearing it like a team, and Mike bringing up the rear. Sunny Jim, tense on the grandstand rail, turned to Allen as the sorrel, galloping steadily, rose, passed the jump, and recovered his stride without a falter.

"A better man than you'll ever come near bein' is out there on a green horse, riskin' his neck because o' you. If he gets hurt, it comes out o' your yellow hide!" he said, and meant it.

For the first time the horses approached the water-jump, a four-foot barrier with an eight-foot, water-filled ditch on the landing side. All four riders settled themselves in their saddles and put on more speed, for it requires speed to clear distance. Rufus, still leading, jumped magnificently, his forefeet coming to earth a good yard beyond the lip of the ditch. After him pounded Dartmoor and Jumping-Jack, and so far behind them that some of the crowd laughed as he came by, Mike and The Lizard.

Mike knew there was time enough to make up any ground; his hundred-and-thirty pounds burdened The Lizard not at all, and he was riding with the one idea of saving his mount. The sorrel had not drawn a long breath. Fifty yards from the water-jump Mike steadied him.

"C'mon, hoss! We got t'get over this three times. Now you spread yourself!"

And The Lizard did, in a long clean leap that carried him over hurdle and ditch to safe ground. Up past Irish Row at the head of the back-stretch, around the turn and so past two more jumps galloped the four, and straightened out for the second lap.

Dartmoor, the weedy bay, began to feel the pace first. Streaks of lather barred his breast, and he was leaning on his bit. Brewer was riding him wide open, and the light-waisted animal was rapidly running himself out.

Campbell held Rufus to his ground-devouring stride, still in the lead, where there was plenty of room. No one was eager to close the gap so early, for more than half the distance remained.

For the second time Rufus cleared the water-jump, and behind him Jumping-Jack flew the obstacle like a bird. Not so Dartmoor. Ten strides from the hurdle Brewer drove home both heels, and the bay, leg-weary and pumped, faltered. He took off too soon, hit heavily, and as Mike and The Lizard landed safely they saw him on the ground, his hindquarters splashing in the ditch, while Brewer, covered with mud, tugged helplessly at his fallen mount's bridle.

"That's what comes from jumpin' careless an' free!" observed Mike to his horse.

Having crossed the water-jump twice, his confidence began to rise; the well-known pride that goeth before a fall.

Rufus was coming back. Campbell

heard the smash as Dartmoor hit, and decided to breathe the big black. Possibly he had other plans, for as Mike and Warren Johnson drew alongside at the head of the back-stretch, the Clymer jockey turned in his saddle and snarled an oath at them.

"You two guys want t'watch out. I got th' weight, an' I'll bump you both if you come too close!" he threatened.

Mike gave no heed to the warning, for Jumping-Jack and his rider were between him and Campbell. Warren Johnson stiffened in his saddle as Campbell spoke. The threat in the midst of a race came as a complete surprize to the sportsman. It was outside of his experience. With a grim smile he said nothing, and stuck to his business. Almost abreast the three galloped down the course, passed the two brush-jumps safely and thundered into the turn for the run home.

Fifty yards from the next barrier Mike felt The Lizard waver in his stride, and with the jockey's unerring instinct he knew what was coming.

"You stand up! This ain't th' place t'make any mistakes!" he said, and tightened his reins to steady the sorrel. Ahead of him, Rufus and Jumping-Jack were going strong. Five lengths behind them The Lizard entered the wings, gathered himself for the jump, took off half a stride too late, hit heavily, blundered, and as slowly as a tall chimney topples, the sorrel upended, his hind legs brandishing in the air, while Mike sprawled on his hands and knees beside him, clinging to the bridle reins.

Sunny Jim, on the rail, breathed a deep oath and started to climb over, forgetting the man beside him until the tightened cord that bound them cut into his flesh. Then, as he turned on the other, he stood rooted in sudden amazement, and a second later roared aloud in wild joy. For this is what had happened.

Mike scrambled to his feet, unhurt, and with a lunge and creak of his girths The Lizard arose and shook himself. He would not stay down. Mike took the first stride toward the paddock, leading the horse that had wrecked their last mad hope. Idly, almost impersonally, he watched Jumping-Jack and Rufus as for the third time they galloped into the wings of the water-jump.

Then something in him tightened like a steel spring, for he saw Campbell on the Clymer entry suddenly swing his mount into Johnson's lighter horse, in an effort to lock his knee beneath his rival's and so destroy his balance or topple him from the saddle. It was an old trick. He saw the gentleman-rider meet it in a new way, for Johnson, as the two came together, raised his whip and cut Campbell straight across the face. Both weary horses, groggy and pumped, rose at the jump together. Both hit, and side by side they crashed down on the far side.

"My ——" whispered Mike, and on the word threw his reins back over The Lizard's head. Wrapping his left hand in the sorrel's braided mane, he clambered back into the saddle.

"Off ag'in, on ag'in, gone ag'in!" he sang with a crazy laugh. "Most of 'em stays down!"

And he drummed a wild tattoo on The Lizard's ribs.

"Horse, if you owe me anythin' f'r grabbin' you out of a mean hole, you c'n pay it back right now!" he prayed, riding his hardest. With each stride The Lizard gained pace, and the other horses were still on the ground.

The crowd, too surprized to shout, was strangely silent as the lone horse and his rider, after having fallen and being left behind, drove at the last water-jump. They could see, as Mike could not, that Rufus and Jumping-Jack showed no signs of getting up. They were prone and breathless. Mike had lost his cutting-whip when he fell, but now he was hand-riding with all the skill he owned.

"Steady an' careful does it!" he muttered, his face the color of wax, as The Lizard galloped into the wings. For an instand he seemed to hesitate, and then a great yell tore itself from the crowd as he rose to the jump, cleared it and the ditch beyond, and landed safe on the far side. By a scant foot he missed Campbell, who was trying to rouse the reluctant Rufus, and as they brushed by Mike screamed in inarticulate triumph. Pulled almost to a canter, The Lizard covered the remaining hundred yards of the course, to win the Green Oak Cup alone, the only entry to finish.

As he slipped from the saddle at the judge's stand, two huge arms seized him, and a bull voice bellowed in his ear:

"Mike, you little devil! You done it!

By th' Great Horn Spoon, you done it!" And Sunny Jim began beating him with bone-crushing force in his joy. Snowball wept openly from sheer excitement and the glory of the victory, whimpering praise into the ears of The Lizard, on whose near side the green strain of bruised turf gave proof of his courage to get up and keep going.

Mike ungirthed his saddle and turned to his partner.

"Say, what'd you do with Allen?" he asked.

Sunny Jim started and looked about him as if to find his prisoner standing at his side.

"Gosh! I clean forgot him. Guess th' string broke when you went down. I was doin' some jumpin' myself then!"

A livid welt on his wrist confirmed the guess.

Slowly a grin spread itself on Mike's drawn and haggard face.

"Don't know as I blame him f'r beatin' it. Who said we couldn't make somethin' out o' nothin'? We win a race, an' a nice bet, an' we get a good horse cheap."

Mike paused, and the grin died out.

"Now, there's three things I want t' do. First we cash th' ticket. Then I'm goin' t' take out a hundred dollars, an' then I'm goin' over to Allen's place an' give it back to him. An' then, seein' as I c'n lay off f'r a day or two if I have to, I'm goin' t' give that bird the mother an' father of th' finest beatin'-up he ever got. It's comin' to him f'r what he did to th' mare. Let's go get th' money. Then we'll mosey up th' road, an' you c'n watch me make th' skunk wish we'd sent him t' jail!"

CARSON WITH FEET OF CLAY

by Frank H Huston

JASPER O'FARRELL—for whom O'Farrell Street in San Francisco is named—while a witness in court proceedings at Los Angeles, gave some testimony that places Kit Carson in a new light, showing that, far from being the frontier *Bayard* or the *Leather Stocking* Sir Philip Sidney he has been portrayed, Carson was at heart just the ordinary man of the frontier of his time.

In the issue of the *Los Angeles Star*, of Sept. 27, 1856, O'Farrell's testimony, as that of others who corroborate him, is given at length. On the stand he stated that:

"Was in San Rafael in June, 1846. Captain Frémont had come down from Sonoma with some of his men and assumed command.

"At Sonoma José R. Berryessa or Besselleya, junior, was *alcalde*, and with others had been imprisoned by José Grigsby, Frémont and others who raised the Bear Flag. José's father, with two sons of Francisco de Haro, all of Yerba Buena, yielding to the persuasion and prayers of Sra. de Berryessa, had embarked for Point San Pedro, intending to proceed to Sonoma to ascertain the status of the prisoners and relieve their necessities if they had any.

They were unarmed, carrying papers showing their position and intentions. Frémont's Delaware scouts saw them land at the point and notified Carson, who was very drunk.

Kit went to the captain, asking if he should make the party prisoners, receiving as answer: "—— it, *no!* I've no room or inclination for prisoners," whereon Kit, with G. P. Swift and a French-Canadian trapper, mounted and rode toward the approaching Californians, dismounted at about fifty paces from them and commenced shooting.

The three poor devils fell on their knees begging for mercy; but Kit and his partners reeled toward them and despatched them. All three Americans were very drunk; they stripped and robbed the bodies, which lay unburied several days.

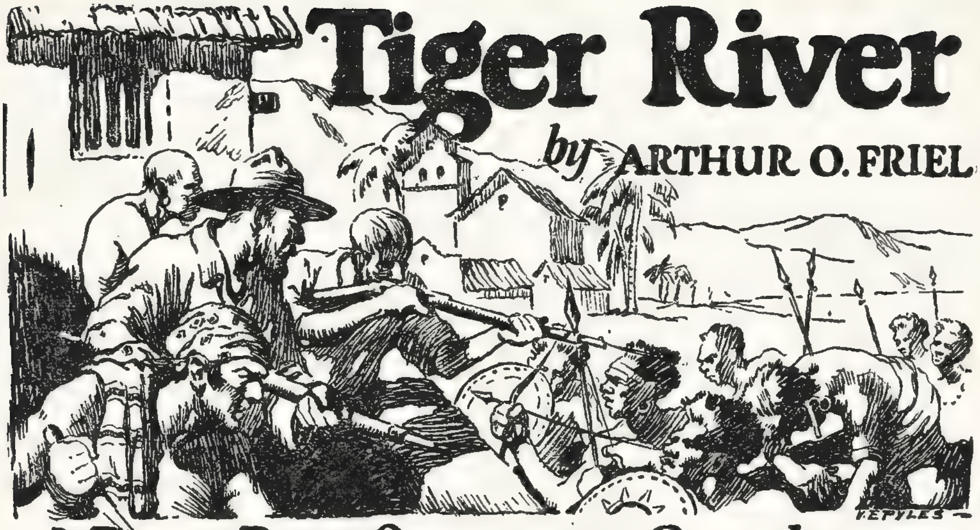
In 1857 Carson, discussing the occurrence, said he regretted his part in it, saying:

"I was pretty drunk; and it was not the first time Frémont had ordered me to do a brutal act. I was under his orders and when he said, 'Take no prisoners,' there was nothing else to do."

Frémont later publicly stated that his Indian scouts had committed this murder and that he knew nothing of it until it was over; but the testimony of credible eyewitnesses and Carson's own admission refute such a statement.

Tiger River

by ARTHUR O. FRIEL



A Four-Part Story — Conclusion

Author of "Blackhawk," "Tupahn—the Thunderstorm," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

DEEP in the South American jungle on the banks of the upper Amazon, José Martinez, outlaw, camped and meditated his troubles. Suddenly he was startled by a voice from across the water; and, as he waited, a river-canoe, containing twelve native paddlers and four white men, approached. With a shout of recognition José welcomed the white travelers.

"It's the Señor Tim Ryan," he cried.

The other three were McKay, Knowlton and Rand—all his old friends from North America. They informed José that they were in search of gold and asked him to join them. He accepted and told them of the rich prospects in the little-known region of the Tigre Yacu—a branch of the Amazon—and immediately they were fired to go.

They set about procuring three small canoes at a native town a short way down the river, and got rid of their large boat. After a quarrel with a Moyamba trader there—an incident which promised to brew trouble later on—they started out anew and soon were well into the savage territory of the head-hunters.

As they were making camp one evening Knowlton and Rand volunteered to go into the jungle to fetch some game. They had just succeeeded in bagging two ducks when a fierce storm came up, and the two sought refuge in the hollow of an enormous tree. Just as Rand reached the shelter, a savage leaped upon him, and the two fell fighting. A bolt of lightning crashed, and Knowlton, who had not yet entered, saw the tree topple, imprisoning his friend and the strange assailant. The next moment he himself was knocked unconscious and pinned down by a falling branch.

Later, the rest of the party, searching for their missing companions, came upon the helpless Knowlton and rescued him from two prowling *tigres.* Rand proved to be unhurt; the man who had attacked him, a white Indian, had been killed by the falling tree.

THE party returned to the river and continued their journey. They presently arrived at a stretch of water, thick with boulders, and were prospecting about for gold when they were surprized by a band of the white Indians and made prisoners. Taken to the native village, they were informed that on the morrow one of the strangers was to die, and it was soon pointed out that Rand was to be the victim. The explorers were then confined in a mud hut and left to meditate some plan of escape.

Daubing themselves with powder and red dye, the captives appeared the following morning as men near death with some curious disease. The natives were frightened and fled, and the five friends recovered their possessions and escaped. They located their canoes and were quickly on their way once more.

Realizing the urgent need for a temporary rest, they put in at a sheltered cove and fell to preparing a camp. Suddenly a strange roaring noise filled the air, and they were astonished to see the entire tribe of their late captors running for dear life, pursued by a troop of what proved to be the terrible head-hunters. The white men volunteered to save the fugitives, and with their powerful guns finished off the enemy in short order. Thereupon the native chief wished to show his gratitude by not only adopting his rescuers into the tribe but by having them marry his daughters as well. This the North Americans refused to do; but José indicated that he was of a different mind.

"Tiger River," copyright, 1922, by Arthur O. Friel.

JOSÉ'S decision brought about a quarrel with the four North Americans, and he took himself off with his newly adopted people, leaving the explorers to continue their trip alone.

The party then left the river and traveled a difficult jungle trail, haunted day and night by mysterious "Things," which did not show themselves until the white men one afternoon were brought up short at the edge of a great chasm in the wilderness. The creatures—green-skinned natives, they proved to be—came out of hiding and forced the strangers to descend over the cliff.

The explorers found a perilous path down and, reaching the valley, proceeded to a curious-looking building there, from which they heard the sound of a bell ringing. They reached the place when night was advanced and were surprized to be welcomed by a strange woman and her attendants. They were given wine for refreshment and were on the point of drinking when McKay, growing suspicious, snapped to his friends:

"Don't drink it, fellows! It's doped!"

At the same time the visitors heard a low, muttering sound outside the walls, then yells and gunshots. With a bound the men leaped to their rifles.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOST SOULS

"O *SANTO DIOS!*" screamed Flora Almagro. "*Las bestias* — the beasts are out!"

If the fighting creatures outside were animals, then they were animals with the voices of men. They yelled, screeched, howled in a bedlam of blows and crashes punctuated by the recurrent rifle-shots. Yet beneath the human voices sounded a ferocious undertone of bestial grunts and snarls—a fearsome, inarticulate growl more appalling than the death-shrieks momentarily scaling high and breaking off short.

"Where away, cap?" called Tim, gun cocked and pistol loosened for a quick draw.

"Stay here!" snapped McKay. "Back behind the table! Heave it over!"

"That's the stuff," approved Knowlton, glancing at the high wall-slits. From the outside no man could shoot through those openings, nor could any creature larger than a house-cat squeeze in at them. With the wall at their backs, the massive table as a bulwark, and only two entrances, they could hold this strong room against all comers until their ammunition ran out—and even longer, with their machetes.

They leaped around the table, tugged at one edge, swung it up and let its heavy top slam down with a crushing thump. The gold bowl and cups clanged on the stone floor, the liquor splashing on the purple dress of the woman and the bare legs of the girls.

"Here!" ordered the captain, pointing.

Flora, her poniard gleaming, dashed around the table and sought to get behind them. The Indian girls followed with less speed—in fact, they seemed unafraid and kept looking at the doors.

"No, madam," McKay said somberly. "You do not stand at our backs with that knife. Over there, if you please—farther along."

"*Cristo!*" she spat. "You think me an *asesino*—a cutthroat? You would let them kill me——"

"We let no man kill you. But we know what was in the wine!"

It was a snap shot, but it scored. Her face blanched, her eyes and mouth opened, and she slipped away from him, poniard up in a position of defense.

"Over there!" he repeated inexorably, pointing again. "And stay there!"

Several feet away, still staring at his bleak face, she stopped where he had designated—protected by the upturned table, but beyond reach of any of her defenders. Still farther on, the daughters of Pachac clustered well away from her, and in their faces now plainly showed sullen hatred of the woman they had served.

"Lights out along here!" commanded McKay, knocking a lamp from its bracket with his rifle-muzzle. The others threw the lights nearest them to the floor and trampled on the oil which splashed out, killing the flame. That side of the room now was very dim, while the two entrances were well illumined.

Two nude figures came slipping in at the farther doorway. Four rifles darted to an aim. But they sank without a shot. The pair were women—daughters of Pachac.

At sight of them Flora Almagro hissed like a cat.

"You devils!" she screamed. "You, you freed the beasts! You opened the gates! When they are driven back I kill you!"

Whether the girls understood the Spanish words or not, they evidently recognized the accusation and cared nothing for the threat. Their lips curled and their heads lifted in a defiant gesture worthy of their maddened mistress herself. Tauntingly one pointed toward the infernal tumult outside. The other flashed her teeth in a triumphant smile. Obviously they were not only guilty but proud of it.

Infuriated by their insolence, she sprang at them with dagger uplifted, forgetful of the shoulder-high table-top intervening. She collided with the solid barrier so forcibly that the blow crumpled her gasping to the floor. The Indian girls near her surged forward.

But, sensing the menace from those whom so recently she had threatened, she closed a hand again over the weapon and lifted its point against them. They paused, hesitated, hung back. Holding them off with gleaming blade and blazing eyes, she hitched back to the wall and leaned against it, struggling to regain her breath.

Outside the conflict was advancing under the unglassed slits serving as windows, ventilators, and loop-holes. The gunshots had dwindled to an occasional blunt roar, and those inside heard more clearly the impacts of blows, the gasping grunts of close-locked antagonists, the moans of wounded and dying. Thus far no man had entered the house. A stubborn hand-to-hand battle evidently was going on, with one side slowly gaining ground. Through the turmoil sounded a hoarse voice exhorting:

"At them, *camaradas!* Over them, *esclavos!* Kill! Kill! Butcher the accursed *atormentadores*—the torturers! Strike! Bite! Crush their skulls! Kill! Kill!"

Rand, after scanning the hollow embrasure of a slit above him, clambered up to its firing-step and leaned into the opening, peering down. Out there in the moonlight he saw wrenching, wrestling figures heaving about in mortal combat—naked arms and knotted fists clutching clubs, rising and battering down—shaggy heads and hulking shoulders hurling themselves past at some foe just beyond—distorted, red-smeared faces falling backward in death—the flare of a discharging rifle.

Over the fighting forms hung a haze of dust and powder-smoke, and from them rose the rank odor of bodies long unwashed. Yet, despite the blur, despite the animal smell, the peering man in the wall was sure some of those battling bodies were white.

This was no Jivero attack. It was an eruption within the walls of the fortress itself. In Rand's mind burned the word he had just heard from the throat of that unseen leader—*esclavos*—slaves.

It came again, from almost under him, that savage voice, that same word.

"Hah! *El capataz de esclavos*—the slave-driver—the foreman! Welcome, *señor*—welcome to death and hell!"

Back into Rand's range of vision reeled a stocky, brutal-visaged Indian, a rifle clutched aloft in his fists. He struck downward. The gun was torn from his grip. A long, lean white body, topped by a black-bearded face split in a grin of hate, leaped into view, swinging down the captured gun with terrific power. The crunching thud of the blow sounded above the rest of the tumult. The Indian *capataz* collapsed, his head a red ruin.

"Hah!" croaked the deadly voice again. "How do you like my blow, you fiend? On, *camaradas!* They break! On to the doors!"

In another bound he was gone. So swift had been his movements that the watcher's brain retained only a fleeting memory of black hair and grinning teeth. Before his eyes now passed a surging hurly-burly of other black heads, upshooting arms, lurching bodies——

"Dave!" crackled McKay's voice.

At the same instant came a struggling, thumping noise from the outer door. Rand jumped down and took his place in the line.

Bump — bump — bump — a grinding creak—another struggling sound. Then that hoarse voice again.

"So, you pig! You would block the door, hah? You hug the wood, hah? Then hang your brains on it to show your love for it!"

Another bump, followed by the thud of a falling body. Hoarse breathing, the slap of bare feet in the corridor, and a triumphant yell.

"Now for that cat who steals the brains of men! Now for that *seductora!* Let her drink her own brew and— *Por Dios*, what is this?"

Into the room bounded the lean killer of the *capataz de esclavos*, followed close by his naked fighting mates. At sight of the upturned table, the four grim figures behind it, and the gun-muzzles grinning at him, he halted in his tracks. Slit-eyed he peered into the dimness along that farther wall, and his jaw dropped. At the same instant four trigger-fingers slacked their tension, and across the faces of the Americans darted the light of recognition.

"Begorry, it's Hozy!" rumbled Tim.

José it was. But not the same José whom they had last seen. He was naked as any wild man of the jungle—naked as the men pressing in at his back, none of whom had a rag of clothing save a narrow loin-clout. His black hair and beard, which he had always kept scrupulously clean, now were dingy and matted with dirt, and half his face was smeared red from a gash on his forehead. But despite his dirt and blood, notwithstanding his loss of clothing and kerchief and machete and knife, there was no mistaking his hawk-face and his tigerish poise. And behind him showed the saturnine countenance of Pachac, his adopted father.

"Ho! It is the Señor Tim and— But quick, my friends, tell me! You have not eaten food given you by that woman Almagro—where is that foul corrupter?—you have not drunk of her cheer? Quick, *señores*, before it becomes too late!"

"Only some *guayusa*," answered Knowlton. "Make that gang of yours keep back!"

Without turning his head, José ripped out commands in Spanish and some Indian tongue. The men behind, who had been shoving to get past, stood still.

"And you feel alert, *amigos?* You feel no heaviness coming on you? No?"

"No."

"*Bueno!* Then you are safe. But lower the guns, friends—these are no enemies of yours. They are poor creatures much abused, who at last break free from the vilest slavery ever laid on men. All they now seek is the cruel cat who made them what they are. *Si*, and I too hunt her! Where is she?"

Knowlton, glancing sidelong toward Flora, found her still on the floor below the table-top. But she was no longer leaning against the wall. Crouching, her poniard still lifted and menacing, she was creeping closer to the wooden bulwark between her and her foes, hiding from them and darting looks here and there like a cornered wild thing seeking a line of escape and finding none.

"Why?" curtly demanded McKay.

"Why?" echoed the naked outlaw, his voice strident. "Why? Use your eyes, Captain McKay, and see why! See what you too would have been tomorrow!"

He turned on his heel and grunted monosyllables at those behind. Then he walked before them to the middle of the room, eyed the still ready rifles and the hard faces above them, laughed harshly, and drew an imaginary dead-line with one extended toe. Turning again, he extended his arms sidewise as a sign to his followers that none should advance beyond that line. Over one shoulder he jeered:

"Look at them, *capitan*—and see yourself in them! Are they not handsome?"

The captain and his companions looked. They saw men whom they recognized as members of the band of Pachac. They saw others, both white and brown, whose faces were new. And in those visages they found something that sent a chill crawling up their backs.

MANY of those faces still were working with blood-lust, many of the savage eyes were hot with unquenched thirst for revenge. But they were brutish, those countenances—the faces of men debased; and the eyes were those of animals—of dogs, of pigs, but not of men. Some of them were grimacing like caged lions; some grinned without mirth; more were sullen; and all, or nearly all, were well-nigh empty of human intelligence. Behind those leering masks dwelt darkened minds, which responded to the commands of José only as the mentalities of broken beasts respond to the crack of a whip.

Bestias, the woman had called them, and *bestias* they were. For that Spanish word means, not only "beast," but "idiot." These men were both.

Nor was that all. On the bare bodies shifting about were welts of slave-whips—not only welts, but cruel scars years old. And among them moved some which stepped jerkily, as if partly crippled. As those short-stepping men came to the edge, where the lights struck them fair, the reason for their grotesque gait was revealed. Like Rafael Gonzales, who had stumbled into Iquitos with madman's gold; like the unknown mestizo speared in the back on the ridge trail, those men were maimed—their toes amputated. And each of the cripples was white.

"*Si*, look at them!" mocked José again. "Look at the missing men of the Tigre Yacu! Here they are, all but those who have died by torture and suicide and the fight this night. Look at the faces of men who were as brave and quick of wit as any of you *señores!* Look at the bodies that dared all hardships to find such a fate! Look at the feet that carried them through *barbaros* and *tigres* and snakes—to this! Hah! And ask again why we hunt the *mujer de mal* who did this thing!"

Once more he faced the four who had been his partners. His voice sank to a low, deadly level. His eyes roved from man to man, glittering with ruthless determination.

Señores, you have been my friends. All—except perhaps you, McKay—still are my friends, if you wish. But we will have that woman, whether you protect her or not. If you try to block us we fight—and you die. In spite of your guns, your pistols, your many bullets, your steel—you die. We are too many and too near, and you cannot get us all before you go under. And if you die so, you die as *quijotes*, as fools.

"I cannot hold these tortured men from their vengeance on her if I would. And I will not try. We will avenge ourselves, and we will do it now. Decide quickly what you will do."

Every man of the four knew he spoke the cold truth. If his implacable tone had not driven home his inflexible decision, the sight of those lowering faces behind him would have confirmed it to the last degree. Yet the woman was a woman; they were white men; and they would not hand over any woman, no matter what she might have done, to such a mob as that.

There was a tense pause. Then the outlaw's mouth twisted in a mirthless smile. He shifted his gaze toward his wives and their sisters, bunched behind the table and watching the parley without fear but with spellbound interest. He studied the gap between them and Knowlton, who was Number Four in the defensive line. He glanced at the girls. In answer to his unspoken question, one of them pointed downward at the hidden woman.

"So!" he said. "She is there, hiding her cowardly body, as I thought. Shoot if you will, you who were my friends. I go to whisper sweet words in her ear."

He dropped the rifle captured from the *capataz*, which he had been holding as a club. Empty-handed, he strode toward the spot where the woman crouched.

But he had no need to lean over the bulwark and look for her. As he lifted a foot for the last step she sprang up.

"*Si!* I am here, pig," she screamed. "Take me—and take this with me!"

Like a striking snake she threw herself at him. Her poniard thrust for his throat.

Then it was that the outlaw's quickness, which more than once in the past had preserved his life, saved him once more. Swift as was her stab, his recoil was a shade swifter. In one backward leap he was four feet away, grinning like a snarling jungle-cat. She fell forward on the upturned table-edge, balked by the wood wall that had hidden her.

But hardly had she touched it when, with another lightning movement, she threw herself up and back on her feet. Her eyes blazed with insane fires.

"Live, then, animal!" she shrieked. "Here is one well-beloved, who goes to death with me!"

Like a flash she turned and sprang at Knowlton, her Señor Gold-Hair. Her upraised dagger darted for his heart.

"Come, my golden one—" she panted as she struck.

Instinctively the ex-lieutenant side-stepped and snapped his rifle upward in a parry. The barrel caught her wrist and blocked its slanting swoop. In the next flashing instant she was seized from behind and hurled down.

The wives of José, daughters of a fighting chief who belted his waist with the hair of his foes, had leaped. Maddened by the stab at their man, they were jumping forward even as she hurtled at Knowlton. Now they were on her like tigresses, tearing at her face, twisting the poniard from her hand. Screams of hate echoed in the room.

As José and his band hurled themselves at the table, as the Americans surged forward, something bright and keen rose out of the knot of struggling women. Like a lightning flash it fell.

Slowly, still quivering with rage, the daughters of Pachac arose and stepped back.

Flora, the last of the Almagros, the jungle Circe who changed men to beasts with her terrible drink, the enslaver of the missing men of the Tigre Yacu, lay still, her own dagger buried to the hilt in her breast.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEVIL'S BREW

FOR a long minute the big room of purple and gold was still. In the silence the only sounds were the breathing of men and the soft flutter of flames blown about in the gold lamps by a breeze stealing in at the loop-holes.

Then three groups again became conscious of one another. The Americans looked up at the Indian girls whose explosion of fury had swept their tyrant into death. Then both men and women faced toward the staring creatures now hanging over the edge of the table.

Vague though the minds of those lost men might be, they had no difficulty in grasping what they saw. Violent death being as old as life itself, perception and understanding of it is instinctive in all creatures. And those men still possessed eyes to see and instinct to interpret. Gazing down at the motionless figure, the blanched face, and the sinister handle jutting from the still bosom, they gradually drew back and let their clouded eyes rove among the gold vessels bestrewing the floor. The fight was done, the enemy dead, and their groping brains already were forgetful of it all.

One among them, besides José, seemed more alert—grim old Pachac, whose gaze rested watchfully on the Americans. Yet his face was hard set, as if it were an effort to concentrate his attention and hold it unwavering. The blight on the minds of the rest evidently had touched his also, but lightly. Among the whole crew the only one retaining full mental vigor was the indomitable son of the Conquistadores, José Martinez.

Now that outlaw did a strange thing. Over the body of the woman whom he had just sought in implacable vengefulness, over the poniard which had licked out at his throat a few minutes ago, he made the sign of the cross.

"*Sea como Dios quiera,*" he said soberly. "As God wills, so let it be."

But there was no hint of regret or forgiveness in his tone, or in the face he turned first to his followers and then to his erstwhile partners of the Tigre Yacu.

The Americans had let their guns sink while they looked down on the woman. They did not lift them again. With the butts grounded, they looked pityingly at the hulking wrecks of manhood beyond the barrier.

Even McKay's iron face showed his feeling for those poor creatures, tortured, maimed, darkened in mind. For the moment he had forgotten José. And José, studying him, suddenly stepped toward him.

"*Capitan,*" he said impulsively, "I have been a hot-headed fool."

McKay's gray eyes met his. McKay's set mouth softened.

"And I, José, have been a bull-headed jackass."

Their right hands shot across the barrier and gripped hard.

"That is a queer animal, *capitan*—a burro with a bull head," grinned the Peruvian. "And it has no right to live. So let it not come between us again."

"It won't."

The hands parted. Both men looked again at the human herd, and down at the quiet woman on the floor.

"Does this end it, José?" asked Rand, nodding down at her.

"This ends it, comrades. Unless some of those slave-driving *Indios* outside escaped—and I do not think it—this whole nest of devils is cleaned. Now we have more cleaning to do; to clean this room and the yard and ourselves. Whether we can clean the minds of these poor people I do not know, but we can clean our bodies, and it shall be done. Then there will be a tale to tell."

"Then let's be at it," said Knowlton, wrinkling his nose at the rank smell filling the room. "You clean up outside, and we'll fix up here. And for humanity's sake give this crowd a bath."

"It is not their fault, Señor Knowlton. Wait until you have seen the sty they were forced to herd in, poor devils! *Si,* and I with them—I am one of them, except that my brain is clear. And that it is clear I owe not to myself but to Huarma, one of my brides—the tallest one, yonder. But of that you shall hear."

He touched Pachac on the shoulder and muttered something. The chief's face relaxed, as if it were a relief to have no longer to try to think, and he turned docilely to follow the lead of his stalwart foster-son. José's voice began to snap in commands, and his hand pointed toward the corridor. At once the listless, aimless crowd became alive and began to press out of the room. The Peruvian followed them up, rounding up stragglers, knocking a gold cup out of one man's hand, shaking to his feet another, who had lain down on the floor and closed his eyes. Last of all, he and Pachac passed out side by side.

The Indian girls had drawn away from the table now and stood grouped at the rear doorway, seeming a little afraid of the bearded men but not in the least awed by the realization of what they had done to their mistress. The Americans gave them no further attention.

Leaning their guns against the wall, they moved out the table and swung it back on its legs. Rand and Tim stooped and lifted the quiet form from the floor. Up on the board they laid her, and just below the hilt of the poniard they crossed the hands which had sought to wield it in death-strokes when, brought to bay by the beasts she had made, she had thought to take with her the leader of the pack or the stranger on whom her sensuous fancy had settled.

Then, moving about the room, the four gathered up the scattered cups and ornaments and the big bowl which, with its venomed liquor, had been thrown over by the upturning of the table. These they placed around her, the bowl inverted at her head, the cups and heavy ornaments down the sides in gleaming array. When this was done they pulled from the wall a long section of the *achote*-dyed hangings, and this they stretched along over the table-top. Then they picked up their rifles again and moved over toward the door.

What they could do they had done. On the dim side of the room the last of the Almagros now rested under a purple shroud, surrounded by the gold with which she had sought to betray four more men into hopeless misery worse than death. And the men, keenly alert, were masters of her house and about to explore its secrets.

McKay paused and glanced around. Then he decided—

"Better leave one man here."

"What for?" wondered Knowlton. "Nothing to guard against in this room."

"Maybe. But Indians are Indians—a knife is a knife—gold is gold."

Rand nodded. The girls still stood as if waiting for them to withdraw. And the captain was determined that there should be no pilfering from that shrouded table.

"I'll stay," he volunteered. "Go ahead."

He stepped back to the couch and sat down. The others lifted lamps from the brackets and went out.

In the corridor they found the big double entrance-door standing wide, gaping vacantly at the moonlit yard, whence sounded the shuffle of bare feet and occasional orders from José. Along the passage other doors, all closed, showed in the soft lamplight. Nowhere was any staircase. The living quarters in this broad, low house were all on one floor.

McKay flung open the nearest door, advanced his lamp, and looked around. Then he stepped back.

"This is her room," he said. "Bring her in here."

The other pair complied. Back to the table they went, and slowly they returned, bearing with them the shrouded figure. While the captain lighted the way they took her to a great canopied bed and laid her down. Then they drew the purple curtains and left her in her last sleep.

Though they glanced around the room, they did not linger. Their roving eyes took in the lines of the high bed, various massive articles of furniture evidently built from some cabinet-wood cut in the surrounding jungle, a number of old tapestries about the walls, and numerous gold ornaments carelessly strewn about on stands and drawer-chests. There was no sign of occupancy of the room by any person other than the woman who now lay there.

Passing out, they shut the door firmly behind them and looked steadily at the Indian girls, who had come into the corridor. Then McKay addressed Rand, who had followed them.

"All right, Dave. Come along. This shut door is all the guard needed here."

He judged rightly. As he and his companions turned down the hall the girls moved to the outer entrance. Covet the shining trinkets though they might, they would not venture to open that portal beyond which waited darkness and death.

* * *

FROM room to room the men worked their way, wrestling with doors which stubbornly resisted, though none had a lock to hold it barred against inspection. Each time, after shoving and prying the wooden barrier open, they found that the difficulty was due to the sagging or warping of the door, indicating long disuse. And each time when they penetrated it they found the room musty and dingy, its furnishings mouldy and its weapons—for there were old weapons in some of them—coated thick with rust and spider-webs.

Bats veered out into the corridor or swirled around the walls, and countless shells of long-dead beetles and other insects crackled under foot. Everything told the same tale: Here once had lived a large family which now was gone.

Not all the rooms, however, were so hard of access or filled with decay. A few showed signs of fairly recent tenancy, and one wide chamber obviously formed the quarters of the daughters of Pachac. Except this one, however, none gave indications that it was still being used for sleeping purposes. The others seemed to be occasional guest-rooms. The eyes of the explorers narrowed as they surmised where the "guests" had gone.

At length they found themselves in a lighted room undoubtedly used as the kitchen. There, among other things, they found the gold bowl which still held *guayusa*, now cooled, and a long stout shelf filled with tall square-sided clay bottles, tightly corked with wooden plugs. One of these had been taken from the shelf and stood beside the bowl. Lifting and shaking it, Rand heard the tell-tale gurgle showing that some of its contents had been poured out. Its plug came out easily—in fact, it still was damp. He poured some of the liquid into one hand.

"Looks like tea," he said.

"Sleep-tea, undoubtedly," Knowlton suggested.

"Yeah," agreed Tim. "That there's the knockout stuff that kills yer brains, I bet. Gee, lookit the line-up of it on the shelf, will ye? Looks like a jungle blind-tiger, with the clay bottles and all. She kept enough on hand to make a hundred idjuts a day, if it works quick."

"Must work quick," McKay declared. "Pachac's people haven't been here long. And look at them now."

"Wonder what became of the women and children," said Rand. "We've seen only men."

"I'm wondering about quite a number of things," added Knowlton. "José will straighten things up, perhaps. Come on, let's find him."

Passing through a smaller room, which seemed to have been recently used for lounging and dining, they entered again the great main hall where they had been entertained. It was empty of life. As they stepped into the corridor, intending to leave the house and explore the yards, the lean figure of José stalked in at the moonlit doorway. Behind him came Pachac, and after them more of the brainless crew swung into sight.

"Ha, *amigos!* At last José is himself again—without a shirt or a knife, it is true, but clean white from hair to heel. *Por Dios*, what a difference water makes in a man! And all this crowd behind have become men instead of pigs, though it took much scrubbing. Now the women have been set free and take their turn at the bath. What have you found here? You have searched, yes?"

"Nothing but rust and spider-webs—and bottles of brain-killer," Knowlton told him.

"That —— broth—it shall be thrown over the walls! But come, let us sit—and, *por amor de Dios*, give me a cigaret! I have had no smoke for years."

They entered the big room, where even as he snatched the proffered tobacco and papers, he glanced about in search for Flora Almagro. Rand pointed a thumb backward across the hall. José nodded.

"Years?" echoed McKay.

"Years, *capitan*. Time is measured by life, not by suns. A man may live years in a week, or only a week in years. Is it not true? And I have been in this place for years, though it is hardly two weeks since I came. Ah-h-h!"

He gulped smoke into his lungs and exhaled rapturously.

Behind him the brown and the white men who had been slaves came sifting into the room. As their leader said, they once more were men, clean from scalp to sole, their skins glowing from the strenuous ablutions they had given themselves; and somehow they seemed to stand the straighter now, to look a little more alive, as if that bathing had refreshed brain as well as body. Yet, though no longer driven beasts, one glance at them showed that their minds still were fettered in a black bondage.

As they pressed in and spread out like an aimlessly flowing stream, the five reunited partners watched them soberly. José sadly shook his head.

"My people," he said. "The people who followed me into this, as well as those who came before me. And you, too, *señores*, would have been spared much if you had never joined José Martinez at the mouth of the Tigre Yacu. I have a heavy task before me, friends—to clean the minds of these men as I have cleaned their bodies. I hope it can be done, but only my wife Huarma can do it."

"How?" puzzled Knowlton.

"She is wise in the ways of herbs and drugs, *señor*. Though very young, she is the medicine-woman of her people. And what one evil leaf has done, another good leaf may undo. We shall see."

"You mean to say that all these men were robbed of their brains by a jungle herb?" demanded Rand.

"I do, Señor Dave. You have heard of the *floripondio?*"

Blank faces answered him.

"You have not. Be thankful that you have none of it within you now. If you had, you soon would know more of it than words can tell you.

"I am not a *médico* or a *droguero*—one skilled in drugs—but I know of that devil-weed, for I have heard of it from men of the Napo country. Up that Rio Napo—and in other places too, no doubt—it is sometimes given a man by his woman when she tires of him and wants another; and he becomes an imbecile who will be the slave of that woman and of her new love, not knowing what he does.

"It is steeped like a tea, *señores*, that is all; made like the *guayusa*. But where the *guayusa* drives weariness from the most tired man and makes him keen, the *floripondio* deadens the brain of the strongest. Put into food or drink, it soon does its deadly work without the man knowing what is paralyzing his mind. Then he is lost.

"So, friends, that is the reason why the missing men of the Tigre have not come back. That is the reason why you now see these who are before you turned to animals. Only a little leaf of the jungle, plucked and put into water—cooked over the same fire that warms innocent food—and then used by human fiends to wreck the reason of men!"

CHAPTER XXVI

FANTOM TREASURE

THE missing men of the Tigre and their new comrades in misfortune, the men of Pachac, stood for a time looking dully about them. Then, as if by simultaneous tacit consent, they lay down on the floor and disposed themselves for rest. Uncovered, unbedded, they relaxed and closed their eyes like men long inured to nothing better. Only Pachac himself still stood, pathetically dependent on the brain of his new son.

"Tired, yes," nodded José. "They have worked under the lash since sunrise, they have fought hard tonight. So have I. But my mind is not burdened like theirs, and it will not yet allow me to rest. Let us sit, comrades, and——"

A fresh padding of feet in the corridor interrupted him. In at the door flocked women and children, led by the daughters of the chief; the weaker portion of the white Indian tribe. Scanning them, the five partners saw at once that the curse of the *floripondio* had not been put on their minds. Their eyes darted eagerly about in search for husbands, brothers, fathers. Having found their men, they ran to them; then sank silently down at their sides without disturbing their rest.

The outlaw's somber face lightened.

"That will help much," he declared. "With the women to follow the orders of Huarma and care for their men, much may be done. I have not seen them since the accursed drug was put on us, and I feared they too were darkened in mind."

He spoke to the tallest of his brides—the one who, he had said, was Huarma the medicine-woman. With dignity worthy of her father, yet with due deference to her hawk-faced lord, she responded. He nodded again.

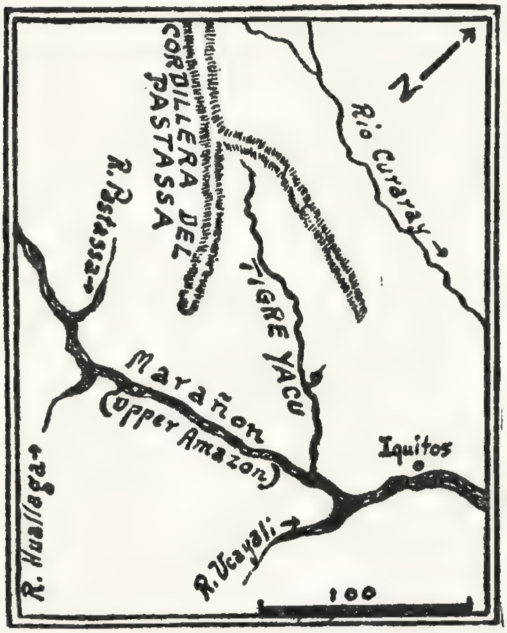
"The women and children," he explained, "have been used as slaves on the plantation, which lies back among the trees to the west. The woman Almagro thought it not worth her trouble to drug them—she knew they dared not try to escape without their men. Is it not true, *señores*, that human fiends always are tripped at last by something they have left undone? If that woman had not held in contempt the women of Pachac, and in particular the daughters of Pachac, we should not now be here, nor would she be lying dead across the *corredor*. But now that we are all together once more, let us speak of what has been and of what may be."

He dropped his cigaret-stub, eyed the table, and, with a grin, strode to it. Shoving the big upturned bowl to the middle of the board, he swung himself up and squatted on its broad yellow base. Then he beckoned with both hands to his wives and their sisters and father. Laughingly the girls approached and ranged themselves along the table-edge, placing their parent in the middle. The Americans smiled as they contemplated the scene.

"Begorry, Hozy ol'-timer," grinned Tim, "ye look like a baboon king—naw, that ain't the word——"

"Barbarian," chuckled Rand.

"Yeah. Jest what a barbarian king is I dunno, but Hozy's one." The metaphor was not bad. Seated on a golden throne, with his foster-father at his feet staring owlishly outward; with his comely women lined at his sides and his people prostrate before him; with the royal purple lining the walls of the spacious hall, the bare-flamed gold lamps glowing, and the jungle moon slanting its white beams in at the narrow openings behind—José Martinez, man without a country, naked and fiercely bearded, looked to be the truculent ruler of some forgotten kingdom resurrected from prehistoric time.



THE LAND OF THE HEADHUNTERS

And here in this untamed land, where the rise and fall of nations and the passage of centuries meant nothing at all, he truly was a king; for in his sinewy hand rested whatever power existed.

Now his gaunt face cracked wide, and he seized an empty gold cup and held it aloft in a grotesquely dramatic gesture.

"*Dios guarde al rey!*" he cackled. "God save the king! But of what good is it to be king when one can not drink his own health? Tomorrow, my ambassadors from North America, we must search our royal cellar for wine not doctored. Then our treasure shall be doubled, for if we drink enough we can see two bars of gold where only one was. Hah!"

"What's that? Bars of gold? Where?" demanded McKay.

"Where? Where but here, *capitan?* Why do you think all these men have been held slaves, robbed of brains, driven with whips? For what, but to work in the mine?"

"Great guns! You mean that? What mine?"

"The mine of gold in the mountain to the rear. *Si!* Gold! The gold of mad Rafael Gonzales! Hah! You are astonished, yes? You believed, as I did, the wail of the woman that the mine was destroyed? She sang you that same song, and you have not had time to think why these men were——"

He stopped short and sprang up, suddenly pale. The others too, except the sleeping men, lost color and staggered. The solid floor had quivered under them.

From the cordon of mountains outside sounded a low rumbling growl. Again the floor shuddered slightly. Then all was still.

"Once more the *temblor!*" breathed José, his eyes darting about the walls. "Once more the ground shivers. But it is past—until it comes again. And these solid old walls have stood worse shocks, no doubt. Let us forget it."

Yet the gleam was gone from his eye and the ring from his voice as he went on, and the sudden fire that had swept the veins of the Americans at the magic words "gold mine" had as swiftly cooled. Each felt the hand of an awful power hovering over the house, able, at its brute whim, to crush it and its occupants into jumbled stones and mangled corpses.

"Gold is here, *amigos,*" said José. "And it is ours. But let us start at the beginning. First tell me how you came here, and what happened before and after."

THE SAT on his yellow throne, and the four disposed themselves as comfortably as might be on the long couch. To stand would not help them if another quake came.

Briefly Knowlton detailed the happenings since José had turned his back on them at the lake of the burning sands. As the minutes passed and no further sound came from the mountains all forgot the recent ground-tremble. And when the tale was done the Peruvian's face again was alight with interest.

"So that was the heavy blow we earth-rats felt this afternoon—the falling of the trail along the cliff. We felt the *temblor* too, down there in our hole—*si*, it sickened us!—but what the blow meant we did not know. Nor did I know, until this moment, of that shelf along the rock; we came in by another way."

"Then there's a way out?"

"There is one—there may be others. We shall see. But when the rains fall hard, as they will soon, that way will be closed. We came in here, *señores*, through the ground!

"*Si, es verdad.* It is true. My father Pachac knew that way, and told me of no other. We came as he directed. We left the path at a watery ravine, going up in the water and killing our trail. And after wading far we followed Pachac, who went over the hills to more water, and so here.

"If you looked about you today, you must have seen that this place is a gulf among mountains. And if it had no outlet, when the rains came they would fill it up, and it would be a lake. Yet it is dry and firm—why? Because at one place near its middle there is a hole, and that hole runs away under the earth to the other side of a mountain to the south, and through it all the rain-streams run out. It has not much water now, and we came in along its bed without much trouble—though it was a long, black journey, and I had to club snakes to death as I advanced."

Thus the mystery of the vanishing trail of Pachac and his people was explained. The Americans made no comment. José went on.

"Now this is the tale of this place, and of the family of Almagro, as my Padre Pachac knows it:

"Long ago, before Pachac was born, and while his father's father was a very young warrior, there came from somewhere to the north a band of hard-fighting men who seemed all of the same family. They came as if seeking a place where they would not be found by some one or something they had left behind them—not fleeing, but always watching toward the rear. And they brought, besides themselves, their women and slaves—white women and Indian workers—the woman dressed and armed like men, and the Indians carrying burdens.

"They found this gulf among the mountains, which then was much easier to enter than now, for into it led a narrow twisting *cañon.* And they had no more than come into it when they spied gold—a yellow splash of it on the side of bare rock, plain to any eye. So here they stayed.

"Not long after they came, another band, much bigger, without women, also came from the north as if hunting them. But the heavy rains were now beginning, and the waters rushing from every side not only swept away all trace of the Almagro trail but discouraged and drove away the pursuers. They never returned.

"The Almagro family made their Indians work on the walls and on the gold. They were hard masters, and the Indians died out. Then the white men went out into the jungle round about, and with their guns they killed chiefs and made slaves of their people. These too they worked to death in their mine—men and women and children, all were driven like cattle until they died.

"This went on for years, and much gold was taken out, but the family stayed on. The older Almagros died, and the younger ones also grew old and died; but the gold still was there. Earthquakes came and closed up the entrance *cañon* and wrecked the mine; but they opened up their gold-hole again and kept burrowing. Yet, the more gold they got, the slower the work went and the weaker they grew.

"Two things made this so: They could not get enough Indians now, because the Indians either moved too far away or were too strong for them; and they would not mate with Indians and keep their family big. They mated among themselves, brother with sister, and most of the children died young or were dull of brain. Some were killed by Indians, some by earthquakes, some by snakes or other jungle things. The family grew very small—too small to be able to leave the place. They knew the Jiveros would get them.

"Then, from trying to enslave Indians by force, they began buying prisoners from those Indians. With the Jiveros they could do nothing, but with other Indians they arranged trades. Whatever prisoners they could buy they took, paying with gold, which the Indians could trade out by crossing the Curaray and then journeying down to the Napo.

"Pachac, and his father before him, knew of this trade in prisoners, but had nothing to do with it. They were wanderers, lived too far down the Tigre to make the trade profitable, did not want white men's goods, and would rather kill their enemies than sell them. But when Pachac's half-Spanish son grew up he had different ideas. He wanted white men's guns and cartridges, and Pachac let him keep prisoners and send them here. So that, *amigos*, is what was meant when we were told we should go to the wheel."

"What is the wheel?" queried Rand.

"It is a thing made to crush ore, and a man-killer. In some ways it is like the *trapiche* sugar-mill used in the Andes, which is worked by cattle going around and around. Here men are the cattle. Many a poor slave must have worn out his life on the infernal thing."

"What's that big bell outside for?" Knowlton asked.

"What is was used for at first, or where it came from, I can not tell you. I know only the tale as it is told me by Pachac. But now it has been used to call in the men from the mine. I suppose that if an Indian attack should come it would be rung at any time, but since I have been here it has rung only at night, after a day without end—a day of horrible toil.

"We were herded in a foul pen behind here, with stout gates which no man could pass. The pen opens into a walled passage leading into the mine. A rotten breakfast at daybreak—a day of torture under the whips of those unfeeling Zaparo brutes we killed tonight—another rotten meal after dark—a night sleeping on the filthy stones of our pen—then back to more labor. That is the life here.

"Men who have tried to escape were maimed so that they were not likely to travel far again—the toes cut off. Some of them now lie here in this room. One—Rafael Gonzales—reached Iquitos, as you know. And you say another was killed by green men above? So some did try again—perhaps the *floripondio* was weak at times and men grew cunning and desperate for a while.

"But I think that accursed drug was put in the food at certain times to keep the men always dull of brain. I think, too, that the use of it was an idea of the woman Flora and not of her father—though I do not know that to be so. But Huarma, my wife, saw that *mujer de mal* putting it into food after we men had been sent to the pen, so I know it was given us at times."

"How come ye to dodge it?" Tim wondered.

"I did not dodge it, Señor Tim. The woman betrayed us all. We knew nothing of her —— brew, and when she received us in friendly manner and gave us food and drink we took it gladly—and awoke in the morning unable to think and covered by the guns of those slave-drivers—guns taken from men who had won through to this place before us and then been made idiots.

"But Huarma, chosen as one of the house-slaves, spied and learned what the thing was that had made us beasts. Then she told women sent to the plantation to find for her a certain herb—I do not know what—it is one of the medicine secrets of her people. This she brought to me at night, with clean food and drink, though she would have died if the guards had caught her. Night after night she came, and my mind grew keen, and our father's dullness too was partly cleared away—she had not enough medicine for us both, and she gave me the best of it. But she warned me to keep playing fool until her chance should come to open our gate and let me lead an attack. Tonight that chance came."

"A reg'lar he-woman, I'll say!" admired Tim. "But where's all this gold ye tell about?"

José arose, stretching his long arms wide, a triumphant grin lighting his face.

"Come and see, comrades—partners! It is put every noon into a vault—the pure gold which has been melted into bars. The guards alone handle it, but I know where it goes—in at a door in the wall near the mine entrance. There must be a huge room there in the side of the mountain, piled with the gold of four life-times. Come!"

They came. Out into the moonlight, down a yard where the stones still glistened redly and bodies lay piled beside the wall, they followed him. On into a *patio* where shone a deep pool of water— evidently the bathing-place of the Almagros—and through a ruined gate like that of a prison-yard; across a walled space whose fetid odor told that it was the slave-pen, they strode. There after hauling open another solid gate, they entered a long runway terminating in a black tunnel. At the tunnel-mouth their guide paused.

At his right showed a stout wooden door, set in the wall and heavily barred.

"Hah!" he exulted. "Here lies the treasure of the Almagros! After all their crime and cruelty it goes to a slave, and to his comrades who tomorrow might also have been slaves. If you would use your gold, you Almagros, reach out now from the *fuego del infierno* where you roast, and snatch it to buy a drop of water from your master the devil! We come to take it from you. Ho, ho, ho!"

He tugged at a bar, which slid with an ease telling of constant use. Eager hands forced the other bars away. The door swung open.

Holding aloft the lamps they had brought, the four stepped in and stared about. For a moment they stood speechless.

"*Carramba!*" José spat then. "What demon's work is this?"

They saw a stone-walled, stone-roofed, stone-floored cell not more than twenty feet square. They saw nothing else.

The vault was empty.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HEAD-HUNTERS

DAYS passed.

Days of work, they were; days of striving to restore the drug-deadened minds of the former slaves to their one-time vigor; days of search for the vanished treasure of the Almagros, of exploration and critical examination of the mine. And each was followed by an evening of discouraged discussion.

Far more success was achieved with minds than with mines. Under the skilful treatment of Huarma the men of Pachac steadily shed the incubus of brain-blight, awaking each morning with clearer eyes and quicker wits.

Pachac himself, whose curative treatment at the hands of his daughter had begun while he still was a fellow-slave of José, now was wholly himself again, though gloomy in spirit because he had lost his most cherished possession—the gruesome girdle woven from the hair of his slain enemies. At some time during his term of bondage it had been cut off him by a brutal guard who found that it served as a protection against whip-blows, and now it could not be found again despite the most persistent search.

But the survivors of the Tigre's missing men, who had been here long before the coming of José and his tribe, showed little response to the ministrations of the youthful medicine-woman. Their brains had been permeated for months, or years, by the terrible *floripondio;* and it was useless to expect a speedy revival of their mental faculties. True, they seemed a trifle less brutish, and in time they might regain full control of themselves. But for the present they gave little indication that they would ever again be the men they had been.

In view of the fact that most if not all of the white men among them had been dangerous criminals before ever they came up the Tigre, perhaps it was as well for the others that their power to plan and execute violence now was more or less atrophied.

They were kept at work, these witless creatures, both for their own good and for the benefit of the community; but not at their former tasks in the mine. First they and the reviving warriors of Pachac were divided into squads which dug graves on the hillside beyond the walls; and there Flora Almagro and the men of both sides who had fallen on that red night of revolt were buried deep. Then they were turned to cleaning up the house and its yard, making the moldy old rooms again habitable and the former slave-pen fit to traverse. After that the Pachac men were set by their chief at making new weapons, while the others were drawn off to work with the women on the plantation—light labor which gave them the fresh air and clean sunlight of which they had been so long robbed in the gloomy mine-holes.

For the present, the mine was deserted by all except the restless five adventurers, who, after a thorough inspection, also left it and returned to their first search—for the Almagro wealth. Their examination showed that the mine was practically worked out. Some gold yet remained, but what was in sight made the inspectors shake their heads; and the place was so honeycombed with shafts and tunnels as to show that the mountain not only was virtually looted of its treasure but absolutely unsafe to work in. An unusually sharp earth-shock would probably cause it to crumple on itself, crushing the mine into nothing. And, in the past few days, several more slight quakes already had occurred.

Yet the pinching vein of yellow in the mine was all the gold they found. Hunt high, hunt low, not one bar out of the tons which must have come from it could be discovered.

They ransacked house, yards, and even the mine itself for some trace. They pounded walls and floors, listening for hollow sounds. They swam about in the bathing-pool, hunting under water. In only one place did they find sign that gold had ever lain. That was on the stone floor of the vault where, José swore, he had seen bars taken in at noon.

That floor bore out his assertion. Between its stones were many grains of the metal, evidently chipped from the bars by rough edges and corners of the rock. But where it had gone, and how, no man could tell, though all sorts of wild guesses were made.

"By cripes, them dead ones done jest what ye dared 'em to, Hozy," Tim said sourly one day. "They hopped up off o' their gridirons and yanked the whole layout down to their Winter quarters. Mebbe it's melted by now and they're swimmin' in it."

José grinned, but with little enjoyment.

"I wish we had saved one of those slave-drivers as a prisoner that night," he regretted. "He could be made to tell things, perhaps. But then there was neither time nor reason to think of anything but killing. And now—dead men tell no tales."

They were standing at the tunnel-mouth as they talked, the hot afternoon sun glaring down on one side, the dark empty mine yawning at them on the other. Along the walled passage leading from mine to pen no other figure moved. Somewhere up the yards Pachac and his men were lazily working away at the manufacture of their new weapons. Out on the plantation, well away from the walls, the women and their male assistants were toiling as they pleased. Within the house the chief's daughters were busy at various occupations. For several days even the distant menace of the Jivero signal-drums had been stilled. All was peace. Yet, from force of habit, each of the partners was carrying his gun.

"Well," said Knowlton, as they turned toward the house, "it doesn't get us anything coming back and mooning around this vault like a bunch of kids who had lost their baseball. The stuff's gone somewhere, and we've looked everywhere. The only thing left is to take this whole place apart stone by stone, and that would use up a few years of time. Guess we'd do better to scout around these hills and locate a new mine."

"The pot of gold was at the end of the rainbow, but somebody's moved the pot," nodded Rand. "Or maybe the rainbow's moved. Either way, it's up to us to move also, unless something develops soon."

He glanced around at the mountain-tops looming beyond the wall. José followed his look.

"I doubt, Señor Dave, if you will find gold anywhere else in this valley," he said. "Remember, the Almagros were here many years. If more gold were here they would have smelled it out long ago."

"Sure. But there's a whole cordillera along here for us to browse in. Say, do you keep feeling as if those mountains were watching you—hostile—ready to jump on your back?"

"Always," the outlaw admitted. "Perhaps those Almagros felt it too, and built these walls more to make them feel safe than to shut out the *barbaros*."

"Made 'em thick enough, anyways," said Tim. "Ye could run a tunnel right through 'em from end to end, and nobody'd ever know 'twas there."

McKay stopped short. His eye ranged along one of the walls—the one in which the door of that empty vault was set.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Tim, I'll bet you've hit it. Secret passage in the wall from that vault to—some place under ground, maybe. We'll rip a hole in this wall and find out. What say, José?"

"*Por Dios! Capitan*," it may be— But no. We have tested the stones in that vault and found no entrance. Of what use would be a tunnel ending in a solid wall?"

"True. But there's something, somewhere, that we haven't found. I want a breach made in this wall, just to——"

"Hark!" Rand cut in.

Across the gulf, thin and high, echoed a scream.

It was the cry of a fear-stricken woman. It came from the direction of the plantation. it swelled from one isolated note of fright to the voices of other women breaking out in mortal terror.

"*Demonio!*" José cried sharply. "The women of Pachac do not scream unless the devil himself is after them!"

He darted away toward the yards. The other dashed after him.

As they ran they heard the outcries coming nearer. Then the screams died down, the women needing all their breath for running. But from the yards where Pachac and his men lounged now rose a new uproar—a harsh outbreak of surprize and rage. Then, high over all, sounded another appalling note from the plantation.

It was the awful death-yell of a man.

THROUGH the old slave-pen, through the *patio* with its quiet pool, and into the yard beside the house ran José and his comrades. That yard now was empty; for Pachac and his warriors had plunged through the big open gate, and their yells of wrathful definance roared outside the walls. José tore on around the corner to join them, his swarthy face contracted into a fighting-mask. But the Americans, with McKay in the lead, lunged straight at the wall.

There rose a crude ladder lashed to the rough scaffolding which they had noticed on their first arrival—one of several short stair-flights by which defenders could man the walls in haste. Up this swarmed the captain and the following three. Hardly had McKay jumped into position against the upper stones when his rifle began to crack. In rapid succession the other guns added their wicked voices in a chorus of death.

Streaming toward them, close at hand now, they saw the panting women throwing themselves up the hill toward safety. Close behind, their light-skinned but paint-streaked faces grinning in mingled ferocity and triumph, bounded warriors of the Jiveros.

The dreaded drums at the west, which a few days ago had muttered back and forth, had not been merely grumbling among themselves over the killing of an ambushed band by the men of Pachac back on the Tigre. The ensuing silence had not meant peace. Now the vengeful killers from the Pastassa were here to gain heads and women and to destroy this stronghold which for generations had repulsed their fathers.

And the big gate was open, nearly all the defenders outside, and their women prizes almost within reach of their clutching hands.

But the hands of those foremost pursuers closed, not on the flying hair or bare shoulders of their prey, but in death-clawings at the ground. From their elevated platform the four gunmen stabbed flame and death downward. From the gate the roar of José's repeater broke out. From the disordered ranks of the men of Pachac a ragged flight of arrows whirred.

The sudden storm of lead and of five-foot shafts struck the nearest Jiveros to earth. Warriors collapsed, pitched headlong, kicked, rolled, were still. Others, disconcerted by the abrupt belch of death from walls which a moment ago had been empty, slowed to fit arrows to their bows. But behind them a thick stream of other savages came pouring across the bowl and up the slope. The rush was checked only for an instant.

"Holy Saint Pat!" panted Tim between shots. "They's a reg'lar army o' the hellions!"

The women reached the gate and reeled within, eyes glazed with terror and lungs gasping for breath. The Americans clattered their breechbolts without raising fresh cartridges. Their magazines were shot out—and the extra ammunition was inside the house.

"José!" roared McKay. "Inside, quick! Inside!"

Another defiant blast from the outlaw's gun drowned the command. An ululation of rage from the men of Pachac followed. Outnumbered though they were, they were seeing red and thirsting to close with their hereditary foes.

"——!" gritted McKay. "It'll be a massacre! Hold 'em, men! Hold 'em with your side-arms!"

He dropped his rifle, leaped down into the yard, sprinted for the gate. The three remaining on the wall unholstered their forty-five's and opened again on the enemy. The ripping roar of the big pistols, the impact of the heavy bullets among them, again slowed the Jiveros in the van, but did not stop them—except those hit, who were stopped forever. The others, though they flinched and batted their eyes at each recurrent crash, loosed a storm of arrows in retaliation. And they came on.

The deadly shafts splintered against the walls, hurtled overhead, hissed between the pistol-fighters. Too, they plunged into the unbulwarked white Indians. Several of Pachac's men dropped, writhing.

Out on their rear now raced McKay with pistol drawn. In three bounds he was beside José and Pachac. His gun and his voice broke out together—the weapon hurling lead at the oncoming savages, the commands striking José like blows.

"Inside!" *Bang!* "Jump—" *Bang!* "—you—" *Bang!* "—— idiot!" *Bang-bang!* "No brains!" *Bang-bang!* "Inside, jackass!"

José jumped. For once he had forgotten that, as fight-commander of this gang, he must govern them—he had reverted to the lone fierce jungle-rover fighting against odds, thinking only of killing as long as he could. McKay's voice brought him to himself. He lunged at his men, cursing, shoving hitting, propelling them in through the wall.

The Indians themselves were sobered a little by the fall of their kinsmen under the Jivero arrows. Under the crackling orders of José and the weight of his fist and foot they gave way, turned, and sprang for cover. But they took all their dead with them, and their wounded too, though the stricken men still living would not live long with the poison of those arrows in their veins. No Jivero should take a head from them until the whole tribe of Pachac was down.

Last of all, McKay and José backed in, dodging javelins thrown by Jiveros leaping toward them. As the massive gate was heaved shut the firing ended. The pistols of the three above were empty.

An instant later the Jiveros struck the gate and the walls.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOUNTAINS SPEAK

LATER on the survivors of this battle were to learn that only a wandering woman, seeking herbs in the forest beyond the plantation, had prevented a complete surprize of the Almagro fortress and a wholesale massacre of its men.

She had spied the first of the Jiveros slipping along through the jungle, creeping toward the house. Screaming, she had fled with the speed of mortal fear, first to the plantation and then toward the protecting walls, her sisters dashing after her. Thanks to their frenzied swiftness and the devastating gunfire, they all reached cover.

But the dull-brained men working with them on the plantation died. Whether they failed to grasp their peril and stood blankly gaping until the Jiveros were upon them, whether a sudden flare of manhood prompted them to leap at the savages and attempt to protect the retreat of the women, will never be known. But none of them lived to move far from the spot where he was standing when the alarm broke out.

Now Knowlton and Rand and Tim, standing a few seconds longer at the wall after emptying their pistols, glanced around at a horde of rushing savages grimacing at them in fury, howling a jungle hymn of hate, brandishing aloft the ghastly trophies chopped from those missing men of the Tigre who would never go out again. The sight of those severed heads and of the vindictive triumph in the faces of the wild men exhibiting them both sickened and infuriated the whites. They threw their pistols into aim once more, then remembered their uselessness.

"Got to git more shells!" rasped Tim. "And then, ye —— butchers—then!"

He stooped and seized McKay's abandoned rifle preparatory to sliding down the ladder. As he did so an arrow impaled his hat and knocked it into the yard, the shaft hurtling on and slithering up and over the house-roof. Others whizzed around Rand and Knowlton, who ducked and dropped to the yard below. A gloating yell swelled from outside, the bowmen believing the quick disappearances due to hits.

The three sprinted for the door, Tim passing McKay's gun to him on the run as they plunged inside. The captain clutched it automatically, his whole mind busy with the urgent problem of bringing order out of chaos, whipping the disordered rabble into an efficient fighting force. And a problem it was; for these men, little less wild than the ravening Jiveros outside, knew only one style of fighting—the slipping, dodging combat of the thick bush, the jungle-animal method of grappling with a foe and dispatching him—and now that they found themselves cooped within white men's walls they hardly knew how to make use of themselves.

Those few who had been trained in rifle work by the dead Spanish-Indian son of Pachac were useless now as gunmen, for, though the guns of the conquered slave-driver were at hand, there were hardly any cartridges of that calibre—José himself had only a handful left for his own rifle. The others, though equipped with their new arrows and spears and clubs, had no poison with which to smear the points of the missiles and no chance to use the bludgeons. All were in a fever to meet their foes instanter, but none acted in cohesion with the rest.

Some shot arrows or hurled spears upward at random, hoping to hit enemies outside by pure luck. Others scrambled to the fighting-runway overhead, stood still while they loosed at the Jiveros, and were swept down to death by counter-flights of venomed shafts. A few even sought to reopen the big gate and jump out with spear or club. The whole yard was a furore of blundering action.

José himself, though struggling furiously to get his men in hand, hardly knew what he wanted to do with them. He too was a jungle fighter, not a soldier. And McKay, who saw that these raging warriors would never consent to herd themselves inside the house and do their battling through narrow slits, could not impress on their hot minds the only other expedient—to carry on a running skirmish along the walls. Nor could he get José, assailing his own men with fist and foot and lurid language, to listen to his roaring counsel. And Pachac, his teeth gritting in impotent craving to bludgeon some Jivero with a huge club gripped in his knotty fists, was neither able nor willing to understand the white man.

The reappearance of his own comrades, their pockets and shirt-fronts crammed with the reserve ammunition, was a godsend to the captain. Mechanically accepting a hatful of mingled rifle and pistol cartridges shoved at him by Knowlton, he yelled:

"Up on the walls! Merry, left wall—Dave right—Tim front! Shoot, duck, run, shoot! Up and at 'em!"

The three jumped for their respective walls. But each halted and threw up his reloaded rifle. Atop the stonework hands and heads were appearing—heads of warriors who had scaled up on the shoulders of others and now were heaving themselves inward like old-time pirates clambering over the bulwarks of a fighting prize.

For a few seconds the yard roared with the rattle of gunfire. The heads flopped backward and were gone. The Americans reloaded and again ran for their stations.

By the time they had scaled their ladders more heads were rising across the stones. Each swiftly shot his own sector clear, then ducked to evade a hail of missiles hurled by Jiveros farther out. They crawled a yard or two, then popped up and slammed a few bullets into the enemy before sinking and moving on a little farther.

The renewed rip of the guns and the up-and-down-and-over tactics of the gunmen had drawn the eyes of every white Indian. Now, with their example plain before all, McKay hammered home his plan of battle.

"José!" he bellowed, his voice booming through the ferine chorus from outside. "Divide forces! Man the walls! Make your men keep moving! Like that!"

His rifle swept around, indicating the dodging three who were shooting down the enemy while keeping themselves protected.

"Keep them moving!" he repeated. "Otherwise they'll be killed like those!"

And he pointed to the corpses of Indians who had stood still long enough to become targets.

This time José listened, saw, understood. At once he began driving the idea into the head of Pachac. That veteran, after viewing again the way the three riflemen were working, put the plan into effect at once.

The warriors, whom neither José nor McKay had been able to handle, caught the idea quickly when their chief howled it at them, and sprang with alacrity to the sides pointed out. This moving, sliding method of warfare was not, after all, much different from bush fighting, except that it was carried on along a narrow wall-path, above ground and behind a stone barrier. From every angle it was the best mode of defense under the conditions.

It not only gave the men on the wall the maximum protection coupled with ability to see their enemies and shoot straight, but it kept them ranging all along instead of holding only small sections. True, their bows were clumsy weapons to handle in such narrow quarters, and the rear of the place was virtually unprotected, due to lack of men. But such strength as the defenders had was now put where it could be used with most deadly effect.

Scrambling along the runway, rising to heave spears and dart arrows out and down, dropping and moving on, civilized and savage allies carried on their jack-in-the-box warfare. Few heads rose now on the other side, for most of the Jiveros had drawn back to get a straighter aim at their quarry; and those who did attempt scaling were quickly shot down by the ready guns. Some of the assailants took cover around the big butts of near-by trees, but the main body scorned defense, moving about in the open and snapping spear or arrow at the appearing and disappearing heads within the walls. And into their mass poured a galling fire which carpeted the hillside with dead.

Yet McKay, though he now had marshaled his forces into the only feasible formation, felt in his bones that this was a losing fight. Rapidly he ran along all three walls, ascending ladders, glancing about, crashing a bullet or two into savages, then descending and dashing to another section; and he saw that, as Tim had said, there was a "reg'lar army o' the hellions," far outnumbering his own weirdly assorted garrison in both men and missiles.

It could not be long before the cartridges and arrows and javelins of his men would run out. Then only five machetes, a few empty rifles, and a meager supply of clubs would remain with which to assail the savages who would come crawling over the walls on all sides. To fight hand-to-hand in the yard against an overpowering force meant inevitable death. To withdraw into the house meant slower death; for the vengeful Jiveros, if unable to batter a way in, would camp outside and besiege them until starvation claimed all immured inside.

José too saw this. He, like McKay, was running from place to place, keeping his men moving up and down, preventing a bunching of forces at any one spot, scaling the ladders now and then to look out and spit bullets and curses at the beleaguering head-hunters. The two met before the big house-door, within which the women and children were packed, watching.

"*Por Dios, capitan!*" grinned the outlaw. "For once I think José is caught in a trap which he can not break free from! But the Jivero who cuts my throat shall cross a heap of his comrades to get me."

"Looks bad," admitted McKay, mopping his dripping face. As he spoke two of the white Indians toppled from the runway, quivered on the stones, and lay still. "Too many for us. We'll have to get inside before long."

"*Si.* Our arrows fail, and— Hah! Down you fiend!"

His rifle jumped and a head rising beyond the right front wall was gone.

"—and we go in and starve," he went on, pumping his lever. "I would rather stay out and fight to the end, but the women—Ho! *Santa Maria!* We have no women—we all are fighting men! Look!"

For the first time both noticed that those waiting women and children were armed, and that the faces which recently had been distorted with terror now were set in desperate resolution. The ancient weapons of the Almagros, the useless guns of the dead guards, the knives of the kitchen, all had been gathered up and were clutched in the hands of the women and boys of the Pachac tribe.

"That is the answer—death now in the open, not death like starving rats!" vowed José, his eyes snapping. "To the walls, all of us! Let us——"

He staggered. So did McKay. The ground was quivering again.

* * *

FOR a moment the fighting died. Defenders and assailants alike felt that tremor, heard a muffled growl in the mountains looming around. Savage and civilized men felt an unnerving sinking at the stomach, a chill along his spine. And the women and children, though stoically resolved to meet death fighting to the end against their encompassing human foes, cried out and sprang from the doorway as the floor crept beneath their feet.

The ground became quiet and the growling died. For a few seconds the tense silence held. Then a rifle-shot cracked, and Tim's gruff voice exulted:

"Yah! Ye dirty butcher, how d'ye like that one?"

A new yell of fury outside answered. Again arrows thudded against the house-roof. A howl of defiance broke from the men of Pachac. The hopeless battle was on again.

"That settles it!" granted McKay. "If we get a bad shock the house may go. Get them out in the open!"

They were all outside already, and they stayed out. McKay and José parted. The captain loped to a section at the left front where several of the white Indians had been shot down, and where the other defenders were out of arrows. He clambered up just in time to blow away two fierce faces which topped the wall. To his dismay, he found no Jiveros now in sight. They had rushed in and now were close to the stones, working upward in force. He grimly held his fire, awaiting the rising of the next heads.

José, working along the left wall, found the same condition. Knowlton, whose hot gun was the only firearm on that section, still was doggedly firing as his chance came; but the Indians on his runway now were looking desperately around for clubs, loose stones, anything with which to continue their fight. Their bows were becoming useless, both because they had nothing more to shoot and little to shoot at—for here too the Jiveros had closed in. Even as José looked along the weakening line he saw Knowlton hand his rifle to the nearest Indian for use as a club, draw his pistol, and loosen his machete. He clamped his jaws and jammed his four remaining cartridges into his own gun. Close work was at hand.

Tim and Rand, with their Indian fighting mates, were in similar straits. Tim had already shot his rifle out and now was working along with his pistol, drilling the upshooting heads. Rand was even worse off—his automatic had jammed, and pounding on the wall failed to loosen its action. And here, as on the other sides, the head-shrinkers now were climbing in ever-increasing numbers.

Yet no man of the garrison left his wall. No man even thought of it. McKay, with his rifle, and Tim and Knowlton with their hand-guns, were shooting faster and faster. José sprang on the top of the stones and chopped with red machete. Indians who had clubs followed his example, crushing skulls with hoarse grunts of satisfaction. Indians who had none yelled to the women below to pass up their weapons.

Instead of complying, the women themselves climbed the ladders and, with knife and ax and ancient muzzle-loader, attacked the slayers crawling up and over at them.

Huarma and her sisters, the daughters of Pachac, rose beside José and, screaming hate into the ears of the encroaching Jiveros, swung the clubbed guns of the late guards down on head after head. The other women of Pachac, with whatever weapons they had gleaned from the house, hacked and clubbed and stabbed. The men of Pachac grappled bare-handed with antagonists who snaked themselves up to a footing.

From somewhere roared the voice of Pachac himself, howling in ferocious joy as he smashed the skulls of his enemies. And the Americans, though some cartridges still were left, sheathed their pistols and joined the hand-to-hand conflict with slashing steel. All along the top of the wall the last furious death-grapple was in full swing.

"Hah!" shrilled the voice of José. "A fight of fights! Kill! Men of Pachac—women of Pachac—kill! Fight to the last! Kill!"

Suddenly a flare of orange flame shot high in the northwestern sky. A roaring inferno of noise burst among the mountains. The ground heaved like a rolling sea.

A grinding, cracking crash of collapsing stones and timbers echoed from the house of Almagros. A deep stroke boomed from the big bell in the yard, terminating in a thumping jangle as it fell.

The walls, with their battling antagonists still heaving and clubbing and grappling, pitched outward in a harsh rumble of sliding stone. A long scream rang across the gulf. Then fell an awful silence.

CHAPTER XXIX

OUT OF THE WALL

RAIN hissed down.

Cold, heavy, thick and fast it deluged a jumble of stones and timbers which had been a house; sluiced along between lines of other stones which had been walls; washed red stains from contorted men sprawling motionless on the sides of a knoll; beat back the senses of other men who groaned, stirred, sat up, stared dizzily around. Then it slid away down the hillsides, collected in new-born streams, snaked along depressions, and, at the bottom of the gulf, crept upward again in a shallow but steadily rising pool.

In the memories of the first men to regain consciousness echoed receding yells of fear and the slap of bare feet fleeing into the jungle. Now from the wrecked walls a new sound crept into the swish and splash of the rain—moans of crushed and mangled fighters not yet dead but dying. Into the horrid chorus broke other noises—cries of men, women, children, revived by the wet chill and staggering up from the ground to learn the fate of those whom they held most dear.

Through the blurring sheets of falling water lurched indistinct figures holding arms before their faces to fend the drowning deluge from mouths and nostrils, peering about for relatives or friends, calling with voices growing sharper as those whom they sought remained silent. Then over all bellowed a fog-horn voice erupting from a tattered figure in dripping khaki, from whose red beard drizzled a stream of rain turned pink by a bleeding nose.

"Cap! Looey! Davy! Hozy! Where are ye?"

For a time none of the voices for which he listened made any response. Other voices in plenty arose; some in joy of reunion, some in repeated shouts of certain names, some in dull groans of pain. Other forms came blundering into his path, but all were those of Indians who peered at him and then stepped away on their own quests. Again and again he roared through the unceasing tumult of the downpour. Then he jumped ahead, drawing his machete.

A tumbling thing on the ground a little farther on became two things. One of them pitched to its feet and glowered down from its six-foot height at a naked huddle of flesh which twitched a few times and became quiet. As Tim pounded up it turned sharply, and the bloody-nosed veteran looked into the swollen face and blazing eyes of McKay. Under him lay a powerful Jivero with head twisted aside.

"Huh! Don't ye know this here war's gone bust, cap?" demanded the red man, slapping his commander joyously on one shoulder. "Enemy's beat it for the woods, screechin' their heads off—them that ain't jellied under them stones. What ye got to pick on this feller for?—bad cess to him!"

McKay essayed a grin, tried to answer, made a wheezing sound, and rubbed his throat, in which showed the prints of big Jivero fingers.

"Awright, never mind apologizin'. Ye sure busted this guy's neck right. Come on, le's git the rest o' the gang."

Together they forged on along the tumbled mass of stone, squinting sharply at every prostrate form they found, the captain turning his aching neck at times from side to side.

"I figger they got slung out, same as I did," Tim roared conversationally. "I got throwed clear and lit on my nose and went to sleep awhile. Dang near busted me neck, I guess—she feels sort o' crackly now. How come ye to keep that Jivero o' yourn? Fall on him?"

"Yes. Got thrown end over end. Struck on my stomach—also on his head. Knocked us both out."

"Uh-huh. And then ye both come to and done a dog-eat-dog stunt, hey? Oh, loo-oo-ooey! Da-a-ave! Hoz—"

"Here!" came Knowlton's voice.

Around a corner of the leveled walls a vague shape came stumbling as if hurt. In a few more steps it became the lieutenant, shielding his face with one arm. The other hung at his side.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You two are still on your legs. Where's Dave?"

"Dunno yet. What ails ye? Bust somethin'?"

"Shoulder's out of joint. Wrenched this leg somehow, too, but it's whole. Handsome nose you've got, Tim."

"Yeah? She feels like a dill pickle. Seen Hozy? Any Jiveros round that side?"

"José's all right. He's hunting around now for Pachac. No Jiveros, except dead ones. Must be a frightful mess under the wall—they were packed three deep when the rocks went over them."

"So much the better for us," was McKay's comment. "You sit down under this tree and let us snap that shoulder back. Then wait while we find Dave. He was on the other wall. Got any cartridges?"

"Nope. Shot out."

McKay dived a hand at the lieutenant's holster, drew out the empty pistol, replaced it with his own. The three moved to the shelter of the big tree near by, where Tim braced his feet and held the blond man tight. McKay, with an outward pull, drew the dislocated shoulder back into place. Knowlton went white and leaned against the trunk.

"You won't need a gun, probably," added the captain, "but you'd better have one on. That one's loaded. Stick here until we come back."

He and Tim turned and squelched away through the streaming grass in search of Rand. Now that all others of their five-cornered partnership were accounted for, they gave no attention to the shifting figures or the medley of noises around them, except to watch for any belated Jivero creeping out of the débris and seeking escape. They saw none such, for every head-hunter able to get away had gone long ago, shocked witless by the cataclysm.

After passing the next corner, however, they slowed and began careful inspection along the line marking the right wall, where Rand had last been seen. Here the ruins seemed to have fallen both ways, as if the convulsed earth had twisted like a wounded snake, heaving some parts of the roughly cemented barrier outward while others toppled in toward the house. As they advanced the rain began to decrease and the wreckage became more plain.

Along it was proceeding work of mingled succor and slaughter. Men of Pachac, armed with spears and clubs picked up from the sodden ground, were using them as levers to pry loose members of their own tribe or as weapons to exterminate Jiveros trapped among the stones. No quarter was given or asked. Head-hunters died with fierce defiance on their faces, savage to the last. The Americans saw, scowled, but said nothing. It was the primal law of the jungle—kill or be killed.

SOME distance down the wet stones they paused. There a little knot of white Indians, themselves smeared red from hurts received in the collapse, were working carefully to extricate a half-crushed man of their race. One of them, spying the American pair, pointed downward and grunted rapidly.

Though the words meant little to the listeners, they saw in the Indian face something which brought them up on the rocks. There the aborigine pointed to McKay's boots, then down under the trapped man.

"Cripes! Must be Dave!" guessed Tim. "Pair o' boots in there, under this hurt guy!"

Their eyes met. Then each looked quickly away. If Rand was caught under those stones——

Restraining their impulse to jump in and help—for more men would only hinder the work—they stood tensely waiting while the hole was enlarged and the Indian drawn out, his face gray with suffering but his jaws clamped tight. Then they got a look into the ruin.

"Poor Davey!" McKay muttered.

They saw a dead Jivero. From below him, between his right arm and his side, projected a booted leg.

For a moment they stood motionless, dreading the sight of the mangled form which must lie beneath that of the enemy. Then they started. The leg had moved!

It strained weakly as if trying to draw itself back. The foot quivered, jerked from side to side, grew still.

McKay scanned the rocks rimming the opening. They were loosely balanced, likely to slip and drop at any moment. He indicated a couple which must be held or braced. The Indians remaining—two had carried away their injured comrade—stepped to the menacing blocks and strained back against them. McKay and Tim stooped, braced themselves, and, with a slow, careful pull, drew the Jivero up and away from his death-trap. Pitching him outward, they reached again and grasped the boots, now both exposed. With another steady draw they lifted Rand.

He was lying aslant, head much lower than his feet, curved in a strained position in a crooked cavern of jagged stones. If he had been conscious when that foot moved he now had lost his senses again. His face, appearing from a dim crevice as he was raised by the legs, was dark and bloated from suffocation. Under him the rescuers glimpsed a welter of smashed things that had been men.

They drew him up and bore him away down the slippery rocks. The Indians loosed their holds on the stones and skipped aside. The blocks slid, grated, and fell with a sullen crunch into the place where Rand had lain.

Out on good ground they laid him down and tore off his shirt, which hung in ripped rags. McKay felt for the heart. It was beating.

"Glory be!" rejoiced Tim, interpreting the slight relaxation of his captain's face. "Begorry, he ain't hardly scratched, neither! Head's all right—legs look straight—arms all sound— How's the ribs? Caved? Nope. Say, them dead guys jest sort o' cushioned him. Squeezed him black in the face, but that's all. Gee, talk about luck!"

And a few minutes later, sitting groggily up and blinking at the figures which seemed whirling around him Rand proved Tim's words true. His frame was whole, though wrenched and strained. His constricted lungs were functioning normally again, the congestion of blood had left his head, and the few cuts and bruises he had received were of no consequence. Yet, but for the fact that a living man of Pachac happened to be caught above him and attract the attention of other Indians, he would have been squeezed to death down in the chaotic rubble long before he could have been found. He owed his life to pure luck.

" 'Lo, Rod," he mumbled. "Where's—Merry? What happened?"

"Merry's holding up a tree and waiting. Nothing much happened. Volcanic explosion somewhere up north—earthquake—everything tumbled down, including us. Jiveros are mostly buried. Now we're all taking a shower-bath. That's all. Feel like walking now?"

Rand dizzily shook his head. But after a minute the surroundings stopped whizzing around him, and he began struggling up. His mates promptly aided him to his feet. Arm in arm, the three passed back down the line to rejoin Knowlton. And as they went, the rain ceased.

In the clearing air they saw Knowlton's blond head bobbing along beyond the rock-jumble which had been the front wall, and before they reached the corner he came limping around it, his face beaming at sight of the rescued man. He halted and waited, gave Rand a slap on the back as they passed, and fell in behind. Reunited once more, the four went on to find José.

As they passed on, their minds now at ease regarding one another, they saw in stark detail the work of the sudden spasm of nature. The house and the walls were stone-heaps. From them now sounded no more of the half-conscious moans; for the injured men of Pachac had died in their traps or were being taken out, while all the Jiveros caught alive had been despatched. Here and there protruded a hand or a foot of some warrior who never again would fight. At intervals lay broken white Indians attended by little groups of their own people. And at one spot was a number of bodies lying side by side on the soaked earth. Among them were a few women—the fighting women who had gone to death like men.

In the hillside itself gaped narrow fissures. Beyond, the faces of the mountains altered. Bare slides grinned out where had been unbroken green. In the precipice along which the four had toiled not many days ago gaped new crevasses. Many other changes, of which the Americans never learned, had been wrought around them.

One, of which they were not to remain long in ignorance, was that the mine of the Almagros was no more. Another was that the underground passage through which José and his people had entered this place now was blocked forever.

As they rounded the corner beyond which José had last been seen they found no sign of him. In the thin mist now rising from the drying ground moved only the forms of the Indian garrison and their women. They were alternately giving attention to their less fortunate fellows and scanning the jungle.

"If those Jiveros come back now—" muttered Rand.

"Huh! Come back from where, feller?" demanded Tim. "Under them there rocks? That's where dang near all of 'em are. Them that got clear are runnin' yet, and ye won't——"

A sudden yell cut him short. It came from the rear end of the mass which had been the house. Up there the startled four saw the missing José. He had been clambering around to get a comprehensive view of the devastation. Now he was prancing and waving his arms as if demented.

"*Señores!*" came his shout. "Come here! *El oro!*"

"What! The gold?" burst in one amazed chorus from the battered soldiers of fortune.

"*Si!* We have it at last! *Valgame Dios*, it is a treasure like that of the Incas! It is—See! With your own eyes come and look! *Santa Maria!* What a yellow gleam!"

Still throwing his arms about, he disappeared down the rubble of stone and timber. Afire with excitement, the Americans leaped away along the line, even Knowlton forgetting his painful leg. Climbing over the ruins of the wall between, they joined José and stood petrified at what they saw.

From the space where the rear wall had stood now slanted a pile of yellow bars. That wall, buckling outward, had spewed out with its stones what had been piled just behind those stones. There in one gleaming heap lay tons of the precious mineral. How many more tons were concealed within the ruin no man dared guess.

"See, it is as you said, Tim and *capitan!* Behold that wall—it ran from the vault to the end of the house. It was hollow—it had not so much stone as the other wall. There was a passage in it—some way of swinging blocks aside in the vault—another entrance here at the house. The house had a double rear wall with much space between the two—I have thought before now that somehow the house seemed longer outside than inside, but I never thought to measure. And the gold was piled to the roof! *Por Dios!* There may be an underground space too—there may be——"

His voice cracked. Dazedly the others

followed his gestures as he talked and danced about. They saw that he had hit the truth. Their eyes came back and clung to the golden glory rising from their feet to the wrecked treasure-room of the Almagros. Then they sank down on the nearest stones and dumbly fumbled in their soggy clothing for something with which to make cigarets.

So, at last, fickle Fate had thrown at the fighting five the golden lure which she had dangled so long before their eyes. And the grim mountains of the Pastassa spurs, which had held the merciless Almagros in their unyielding grip until no Almagro was left, now had smashed all their handiwork into chaos. A little while, and the gulf where they had lived and died would be a noisome pest-hole. And the booty wrung from the bowels of the stone by four generations of torture and treachery would go out on the backs of men who fought hard—but fought clean.

CHAPTER XXX

THE KING OF NO MAN'S LAND

THE banks of the Tigre Yacu were full. Between the shores where, a few weeks ago, clear water had crept languidly along at the bottom of a rock-strewn natural ditch, now rolled a turbid flood; and from both sides sounded the splash and gurgle of smaller streams hurrying in with the burden of water dumped on the hillsides by the latest rain. Now the sun had broken out again, and from every dripping leaf sparkled gems of moisture.

In a little cove, where the downward-sweeping waters slowed and swung about in a wheeling eddy, a grotesque object floated and tugged at its moorings of stout bush-rope; a nondescript creation such as the mysterious Tigre, which before now had washed many a weird thing southward in its eternal journey from the cordillera to the Marañon, never had upheld on its restless bosom.

Two stout canoes, covered over, formed its nucleus; reenforced with logs, they upheld a platform with built-up sides and curving roof. A combination of *balsa*, pontoon, raft and box, it was, and as ugly a vessel as ever traveled jungle waters. Yet, for all its homeliness, it was a treasure-ship. The box-like platform held a fortune in pure gold.

Now the men who had created it stood lined along the bank: Four Americans, one hawk-faced Spaniard, and some forty Indians whose skins were only a shade darker than those revealed by rips in the clothing of the khaki-clad white men. Near the lean South American loitered a number of lithe young women whose dark eyes turned to him at his every word or movement. Farther back were a sprinkling of other women and children.

These were the survivors of the no-quarter battle with the Jiveros and the earth-convulsion which had crushed that fight into nothingness at its desperate height; the five partners and the death-thinned people of Pachac. Among them Pachac himself no longer stood.

Caught and killed in the collapse of the wall he was holding, he had passed out as he would have wished—in the flaming fury of hand-to-hand battle with his foes. Now the commander of the tribe was the man whom he had taken as foster-son—José Martinez, outlaw, killer, and son of the Conquistadores.

For days after the wrecking of the house of Almagro every able-bodied man, woman, and child had toiled feverishly at the great gold-pile, the white men driven by their own treasure-hunger and the Indians by the crackling voice of their Spanish chief. From dawn to dark, with hardly a pause to snatch food from the plantation, they had transported the yellow bars in a steady stream to a spot well up the nearest mountain, where the air was fresh and clean. Fortunately, the sky had remained overcast much of the time, and, as often happens in the Andes region after an earthquake, the air had been decidedly cold.

Thus favored, the toilers had been able to labor long in the midst of the ruins before the sun turned hot and the air became pestilential. By the time they were compelled to flee, the place had been quite thoroughly looted.

Even had it been possible and desirable to extract and bury or burn the dead and reconstruct the demolished house, the grim decree of the mountains forbade it. Not only had they plugged the natural drain of the gulf in their spasm, but at every fresh rainfall they sluiced more water into the pool which had formed and was stealthily creeping farther and higher along the bottom and sides of the misshapen bowl. Henceforth no man should live in the chasm where so much of human maltreatment and misery had resulted from their first admittance of men.

When the deluges of the forthcoming wet season should end, the sinister knoll and its stones and bones would be sunk under a stagnant lagoon wherein only reptilian creatures could spawn; and the Almagros, after all their ruthlessness and strife, should lie forgotten forever in a bed of slime. So the stern giants towering around had determined, and so it should be.

But none of those who toiled to salvage the treasure-trove had any desire to remain. As soon as their prize was safe they sought a way out, eager to be gone for all time from that hole. And, thanks to the jungle craft of the nomads of Pachac, they found at length an exit whereby they could reach again the vague path by which they had journeyed up the Tigre. Thanks also to the Indians, they lived off the forest and the bush while the gold was brought out and packed down the trail and while the clumsy river-craft was built and loaded.

Nowhere had they met Jiveros. But a few days after the earthquake they had heard the drums off to the west begin to grumble again, and guessed that the survivors of the savage expedition had returned to their own land with their tale of doom. Nor had they seen again any sign of the gaunt green-dyed servitors of Flora Almagro who had speared the escaping toeless man and forced the Americans adventurers over the edge of the abyss. What had become of them only the inscrutable jungle could tell; and, as always, the jungle remained dumb.

Now the time for parting was at hand. And for a time no word was said. Wistfully, yet proudly, José stood among his people and looked at his four comrades who were leaving him. Like his men, he wore on his body the loin-mat of the white Indians; but, unlike them, he retained around his shaggy head a faded red kerchief, and in one hand he held his battered old rifle—his crown and his scepter as king of the little tribe. Down one bare leg, too, dangled his machete.

None of his hard-won gold was on the bank. In fact, it was miles away, secreted in a cave which he had discovered just outside the mountains ringing the gulf. His only visible possessions now were his gun, his bush-knife, and the partly filled tin of .44 cartridges which the Americans previously had left with the updrawn canoes.

"No, *señores*, I will not have my share of the treasure carried farther now," he had said when making his cache. "Of what good is it to me? Now that I have it, I can think of only one use for it; and the time to use it so has not yet come. You are eager to go out, while I—where should I go? Let us move on with your gold. Mine will keep here."

The Americans, though asking no questions, had guessed at what he intended eventually to do with his prize—and had guessed wrong. Now, standing beside their laden craft, they thought of it again. McKay bluntly spoke out:

"Where do you expect to hang out after you leave here, José? We'd like to keep in touch with you. Going back over the Andes to gild the palms of the authorities and enjoy life? Or down the Amazon? Or over to Europe?"

A slow smile passed over the outlaw's face and died. He answered with the cool dignity of a *caballero*.

"Once, *capitan*, a misbegotten creature arose between us—a burro with a bull head. It came up because you had a thought like the one you have now. But it shall not lift its head again.

"You think the natural thing, *capitan*, but you have it wrong. I, José Martinez, return across the Andes and buy the favor of officials? Bah! Who throws meat to yelping dogs which are too far off to bite him? Not I. Still less do I journey to those dogs and drop the meat in their greedy jaws.

"And down the Amazon, or across the sea, should I be content? No. I have been too long a wild rover of the jungle. In the jungle I stay."

His eyes went to the girls near him, and again his lips widened—this time in the sardonic grin of José the bushman.

"And if I would desert my brides, *amigos*—for they never could come with me into the cities, and I must abandon them if I go—if I thought of forsaking my little tigresses of the Tigre Yacu, there is another reason why I should stand by them."

The four looked into his twinkling eyes, then at his girl wives.

"What! Already?" blurted Knowlton.

"Why not, *señor?*" laughed the other. "Did I not once say to you that if we

Spaniards would pause at times between our fighting and our gold-hunting we could people the world with fighting men? And every man should prove his words by deeds, is it not true? Unless Huarma and her sisters and I are much mistaken, soon there will be five little Josés asking me for little guns to play with."

"Gee gosh!" muttered Tim.

"Quite so, Señor Tim. And that is not all. The four sisters of my wives have decided that they also should become brides of their chief. And who am I that I should deny them? So all the nine daughters of Pachac become the wives of the son of Pachac."

McKay threw up his hands.

"Come on, fellows," he said. "He's raving. Let's go."

"One moment, *capitan*," laughed the white chief. "Help me with a problem. With sons each year for twenty years, how many shall I have?"

The captain shook his head and glanced at the boat. Rand answered.

"Barring twins, one hundred and eighty."

"OOF!" grunted Tim. "Cap, ye're right. Hozy's crazy as a bedbug. Hozy, jest wait till the first nine all git to squallin' together, and ye'll never wait for the other hundred and seventy-odd. Ye'll come a-runnin' and jump into this here river, squeakin': 'Here goes nothin'!'"

"You do not know me, comrade," chuckled José. "If they vex me I shall go out and kill a few Jiveros. That is one reason why I stay—to kill Jiveros."

"A laudable ambition," conceded Knowlton. "But where does your gold fit into your plans? None of my business, maybe, but——"

"But why is it not your business, friend? I will tell you what is in my mind."

He looked along the silent line of his adopted people, and his face sobered.

"There was a time, before I had fought against those Jiveros, when I had for them some respect. I said to you that if my head must be taken by any man I would wish it to go to those fighting wild men. But since I have fought them, since I saw the headless bodies of those poor fellow-slaves of mine who were cut to pieces on the plantation, since I have heard the true tales told of them by Pachac and his people—No, I have no respect for those accursed ones! They are beasts.

"Now, as you say, I have gold. Now that I have gold, it means little to me—the gold itself. It was a bait, a lure, a thing that kept me striving on in spite of death and the devil. And that struggle to get it, *señores*, the fighting and adventure and hope and despair—that was the real prize—that was living! And far above all those things, *amigos*, I treasure the memories of the days and nights I have spent with my North American comrades—men I could trust, men I could like, men in whose company I could sleep without awaking to find a knife near my throat.

"But that time is past, and you go. Now I look to what is ahead of José—and of the people of José. I have looked on the mountains to the north and found them good. Not that hole of the Almagros, but the great wild cordillera which no man owns—where the shrinkers of heads travel, where more gold lies waiting, where the law of the yellow-dog men of the western cities does not reach. I will make those mountains mine!"

The old flush of enthusiasm was rising in his cheeks, the old ring creeping into his voice.

"*Sí!* Mine! I will not be a petty chief of a vagabond tribe—I will be a king of the wild lands! A barbarian king, perhaps, as you said not long ago—but a ruler of hard fighting men, a maker of war on the demons who shrink the heads of men and make beasts of women. *Sí!* I, José!

"Behold these people of Pachac. They have no tribe name that I can recognize. They call themselves only The White Ones. No, not Yámeos. The White Ones. And in other parts of this thick country the spurs, and north toward the Curaray, are more of The White Ones. So these tell me. They tell me, too, that they can lead me to some of those other White Ones, and from them we shall learn of still more. All are bitter haters of the Jiveros.

"Now for my gold. Already that young half-Spanish son of Pachac had trained a few of these men to use rifles. I shall carry on what he began. With my gold I trade for more guns—and I get the best! I buy many cartridges. I bring together the other White Ones. And there in the mountains we make a stronghold that shall make that one of the Almagros seem a house of clay. We drive the Jiveros howling west to the

Morona—to the Santiago! *Por Dios*, we sweep them back against the Great Cordillera itself!"

The four stood fascinated as the magnitude of his ambition fired them. Then Rand spoke—

"And then, the first thing you know, you'll be at war with two governments."

"*Si?* The government of Peru, which has cast me out? The government of Ecuador, which can not rule what it claims? They can not even agree on their own boundaries, as you *señores* must know. Ecuador calls this its Provincia del Oriente, but what does it mean? Nothing. And to me the paper laws and decrees of both of them are nothing. This is No Man's Land, and I will be its king!"

"Begorry, it's jest like I said!" exulted Tim. "Didn't I tell ye so, Dave, down by that red-hot lake? The King o' No Man's Land, jest like I seen it comin'! And I'll tell the world ye'll make one rip-roarin' king too, ye ol' scalawag. Dang it, I wisht I could stick round awhile. If I only had a new outfit— But shucks, I got to git me money home. So long, ol'-timer, and more power to ye!"

He reached a red-haired fist and gave the chief of the White Ones a mighty grip. In turn the others followed his example. Then they clambered aboard their treasure-ship, set themselves at the powerful steering-oar they had built, and nodded to José.

Slowly, regretfully, the outlaw lifted his machete to sever the bushropes mooring the straining craft.

"*Adios, camaradas!*" he called.

"*Hasta luego,*" countered McKay.

"What! You will come back some day?"

"Never can tell. We might get bored and come looking for some excitement."

"Hah! Come to me in the mountains and I will feed you excitement until you choke! Until then— *Vaya con Dios!* Go with God!"

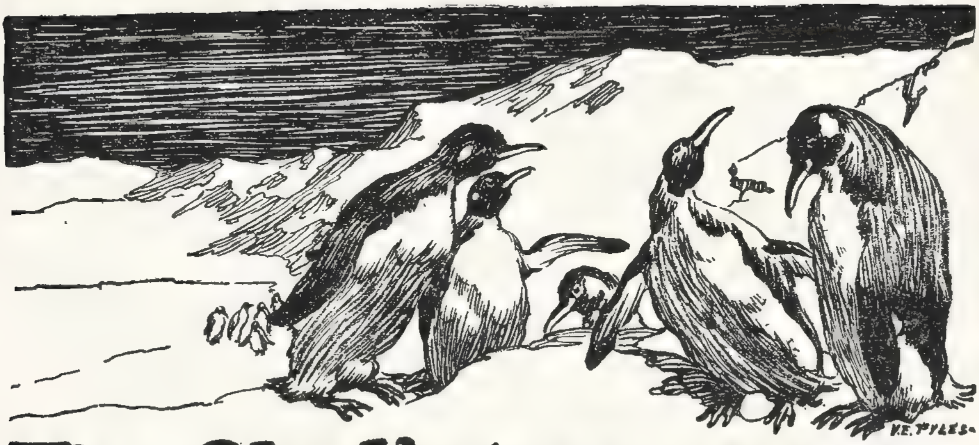
The blade chopped down. The craft swung outward and checked. Again the steel fell, shearing another rope, and the boat floated free.

Amid a final chorus of yells it gathered headway and surged down-stream, its crew swinging at the long rudder. Then it settled itself for its long voyage to the mighty Marañon. Hands shot up in the last gesture of farewell. Around a slight bend it drifted, and the jungle of the Tigre Yacu blotted it from sight.

For a time the red-crowned man at the water's edge stood motionless, his face somber, his dark eyes dwelling wistfully on the spot where his partners had vanished. Then, with a sigh, he stooped and lifted the case of cartridges to his shoulder.

Up-stream he turned, warily scanning the bush. Up-stream the armed warriors and the rest of the little tribe silently followed him. And into the green shadows the coming King of No Man's Land and the nucleus of his army of The White Ones passed and were gone.

THE END



The Gladiators

by F. St Mars

Author of "The Mystic," "The Frozen Frontier," etc.

IT WAS apparently a country from which all life had been frozen—this is worse than being burned out—and the desolation was worse than the desolation of the Sahara, or the Pacific. There things live, at any rate some things of some kind. Here nothing lived—no mammal, nor bird, nor reptile, nor fish, nor crustacean, nor tree, nor plant. It was dead, this land, had been dead for Heaven alone knows how many centuries of centuries, dead, dumb and done for.

Only the wind lived there. That was never dead for long; and it blew, and it blew, and it blew, as assuredly no wind ever blows in any other part of this earth, adding itself to the cold, which was about zero already.

It was not a country to inspire terror, or even fear. It numbed and crushed the soul, and left a sort of stunned hopeless void in its place. It was as if some great wrong had been done upon that land at some time 'way back in the eons and Nature had cursed it—forever. It was, in very many ways, like what we might imagine the moon may be like.

The land was frozen; the shore was frozen piled hills of ice; the sea was frozen solid as far as eye could see; and the only thing that moved was the wind, and that you couldn't see.

Then something else moved, and one's feeling at the sight of it was like the feeling they must have experienced in the ark when the dove returned, only multiplied about six hundred and sixty-six times. Emotion was dumb. A man might have cried at the sight of a flea to bear him company in those parts and cherished it like his long-lost brother, knowing that he and it were the only representatives of life there. But this thing was not a flea, though it looked no larger—just a black moving dot 'way, 'way out over the endless, level, hateful, pitiless, glaring ice.

Then there were two dots, then one, then none. Then after quite a long time there were, much nearer, two very, very tiny black dots, much smaller than the others, mere specks first, coming steadily along, one behind the other, over the snow-covered ice—like ants that crawl upon a white sheet spread on the ground—and they grew, and grew steadily, slowly, almost imperceptibly till at last they took shape and became, not living things merely, but heads, black heads.

Finally they evolved themselves into the black heads of—good gracious!—little, fat, waddling mannikins, in the fullest of full evening dress, black tie, broad white shirt-front, white waistcoat, black tail-coat and all. In such a place these creatures walked serenely over the frozen sea out of the frozen distance toward the frozen land, hundreds of miles on broad, stumpy legs that looked scarcely longer than a cigaret—toward that lonely, lifeless land.

They must have walked, for they had no wings, and there was no open water to swim in, though surely that toddle of theirs could not at full speed produce more than the furious velocity of about a mile an hour. Also there was no food by the way, mark you, so that unless they had drawn nourishment from the very snow itself they must have fasted all the time.

Very slowly they came on, those two grotesque little creatures, alone, and yet with such a strange air of fine determination, in that awful lifeless wilderness of cold and desolation, till at last they began to ascend the tumbled pile of packed ice, and the wonderful ice terraces which divided the beach from the sea.

Here a snow shower came whirling down and blotted them out; and when next they appeared they were on the beach itself, standing hunched up behind the shelter of a rock, like loafers with hands in pockets at a street-corner in the rain. And it was then at last that one could clearly see that they were not little elfin men at all, as they had appeared to be, but birds—to be exact, penguins.

We have to deal with only one of them, however, a fine cock, boasting a height of something near two and a half feet upright, and uniformed in all black above, and all white—wonderful sheeny, grebe-like white—below water-line, with a black face, a black chin and neck, and what looked like white eye-glasses enclosing a rich brown eye. He had come there to that place to nest, traveled goodness knows how many miles over that infernal, eternal ice to nest on that forsaken, abominable beach in a temperature out of which the bottom seemed to have tumbled.

More, he had walked all the way, or kicked himself along on his beautiful fat white tummy when the going was slippery and smooth, every inch of the way through wind that seemed to carve one all to little bits, and through blizzards that hammered and battered and smothered one, and left one half-dead—all this had he done.

Impossible, if he had not shown it possible. Impossible to accomplish out to the end if— There was a light in his eye, and a resoluteness of bearing, however, that refused to believe anything impossible.

Oh, and by the way, he could not fly of course; he had only long flippers, like paddles, also black above and white below, to swim with, and never a chance to swim had he had on the way. Also he had fed on hope—there was nothing else.

Now he stood moping in a most dejected fashion behind his rock, watching with his peculiar staring, white-rimmed eyes in his black head, which made him look like a golliwog in some wise, the steady, silent drifting snowflakes go by. He might have been asleep if his eyes had not been open. By the same token any foe seeking a free lunch might have crept upon him unaware.

He kept no sharp lookout with the restless intensity of other birds. There was no need. He and his friend were the only living things there, and all the foe they had was the diabolical wind.

Night came; at least it seemed to be coming and grew dusk and more dusky, but the affair seemed to stick half-way, and the full darkness never came. The two penguins did not move; they slept. If any human being had stood there in that same place without moving he would have slept too—and never waked up again! It was all that cold, and a bit more.

By the time dawn came—if one might call it so, though the horizon was a sheeted hurrying cloud of snow, and the wind like invisible frozen swords—one began to wonder what was going to happen to the penguins if they couldn't find the breakfast that most obviously wasn't there. But they did not seem to wonder about breakfast at all, or lunch even, for the matter of that.

They simply stood about, bolt upright because their legs were stuck on far back like our own, moping and staring disconsolately at that miserable landscape and the hurrying snow showers, which once became a blizzard with furious wind accompaniments.

In the afternoon, up from the frozen sea, out of the drifting white fog of the snow, a third penguin arrived, on precisely the same path as the first. Our friend merely glanced at him as he toddled to shelter and lay down, evidently fairly done up.

Then night once again added itself to the hopelessness of the day, and our friend went supperless to sleep, without saying anything, and alone.

DAWN, however, found a different prospect, a calm morning and a mist. The penguin we are concerned with toddled out from his rock shelter and stared out from a rock ledge across that iron-bound sea; and as he looked he beheld one after the other, sometimes alone, sometimes with a pal, and always following the same route, other penguins arriving. Soon there were thirty or so, struggling up over the piled ice terraces beyond the beach, and scattering themselves about to rest, or wander around, more than ever like street-corner loafers with hands in pockets.

That night there was a heavy fall of snow; and "dawn" found our little friend, or rather didn't find him, stolidly digging himself out of his own white grave, to spend the whole day hanging around, watching more penguins arrive, now sometimes in a little procession, or again singly, or in parties; and there began to rise upon the air from the beach a subdued but cheerful tone of conversational chatter as the newcomers spread themselves abroad, some halting on the beach, others going on to the higher ground, but always they came in by the same route.

When our penguin looked out at next "dawn," however, a change had come over the scene again. Penguins must have been arriving all night, and were still coming in. Many were lying down asleep, with their heads stretched out, in the snowy hollows—whereon was shelter from the wind. They just seemed to have spread themselves around and sat down, some alone, some in company—each one with an air of waiting, a look, a manner to be seen in the case of pilgrims, who, at the end of their journey, sit about waiting for the final act, the culminating point of their efforts.

Our friend watched them all day, and although one can not be positive about his eating snow, surely he ate nothing else, because there was nothing else there to eat. Nevertheless he looked so fat and sleek and well that it did not seem to matter much. His activities were nil, for he simply appeared to spend his whole time standing, or lying snuggled into the snow.

At "dawn" on the following day things awoke. Thousands of penguins had arrived, and were arriving, many during the night; and the noise of their chatter as they moved about, spreading out over the hillocks and even up the high hills, grew like the united voice of a big camp.

Our own penguin stood up and waddled forth. From where he stood he could see a long, sinuous line of black and white—like a snake, but it was of penguins—stretching away over the ice into the far distance. Numbers were gathered on the edge of the shore, taking a breather before climbing the beach; and all over the land around him everywhere the snow was sprinkled with black-and-white dots, so that at a distance it looked like pepper and salt.

For quite a long time our funny little friend stood there apparently meditating upon things in general, while there came up to him from all around a ceaseless babble of harsh voices. Then quite suddenly he appeared to make up his quaint mind, and, turning inland, marched off resolutely toward the hillocks, and was soon merged into the crowd.

All around him as he toddled along were penguins, most of them saying something. Hen penguins sitting motionless upon what looked like old nests, just doing nothing but gazing; hen penguins crouched on a little circle of scraped-up ground, hammering away at the face of an equally bellicose neighbor; hen penguins building up nests by the simple process of making a ring of stones; cock penguins making love to lady penguins; cock penguins fighting for the girl of their heart; cock penguins bustling about hunting for, or carrying away, stones for their new nests; cock penguins thieving other people's property, and getting mightily chased for their pains, and cock penguins doing nothing much but just mope about and look on.

So they were, and so our penguin saw them; but he cared nothing, neither took he any notice of the whole lot. He just strutted straight on, threading his way in and out, as a man threads his way in and out of a crowded market, and speaking to none by the way. And then quite suddenly he stopped.

There was a hillock at this spot, crowded more or less with penguins, and crowned as to the top with three penguins and—a fourth. The three were calling one another every blackguard name they could think of. The fourth was saying nothing, and was looking very uncomfortable to boot.

Then arrived our penguin—running with beak open and flippers extended, and the devil shining out of his eyes. Smack in among the three abusive cocks he charged, and stopped, but only for a second, to square up to the biggest of them, and get to work.

The fourth penguin looked even more uncomfortable than ever. She was a hen.

Now you know the noise that some

wooden rattles make, or those children's toys with pieces of pliable wood that click when the toy is whirled around? Well, it was like that, and that represented the combatants' flippers hammering at each other. Imagine receiving punches at that rate; and they were no mean blows either. A man who had felt one would have wondered how those sturdy little chaps could stand up to a rain of them. One would have received an instalment, just a short one, upon one's head as an experiment, just once. But those birds were taking them not in instalments, but by the hundred.

When they were exhausted they lay down. When they were breathed they got up, and that appalling machine-gun fire of flipper-blows beat on again. Facing one another, chest to chest, upright as drum majors, they strove. One would never have believed that any creatures so small, or even bigger, could so strenuously and so continuously give and take such a punishing, hammering hail of blows.

All in and out among the others, up and down, and round about that hill the battle raged, causing no end of commotion, till at last our little friend drove his opponent out alone on to the snow, where the latter tripped and was never given a chance to get up again.

Our hero turned, and another enraged cock, a husband this, whose sacred home he had disarranged in the struggle, hurled down upon him, and battle began all over again. All the same, our little fellow was not to be put down. He fought like several furies, expanding his chest up against the foe, pushing all he knew how with his peculiarly thick short legs, and literally drumming away with his long, strong flippers.

There was blood on both pure white breasts when they had finished, but the enemy invited himself out of reach in the end, and did not come back and ask for more, and our penguin ran, literally ran with flippers making as if they would fly if they could, back to his lady love.

He found his remaining rivals just as he had left them, standing motionless as if it were a point of honor to keep thus, like wax-works, and wait till he or the other came back. They had yet to be discouraged; and one advanced now to meet him.

That was a shocking battle because our penguin would not give in, although any one could see that he was really beaten from the start. The handicap of his two previous fights was more than his strength could accept, and in the end it was his turn to be driven out into the snow, back inch by stubborn inch, and then down, beaten, pounded and hammered and left motionless and inert, apparently dead.

All alone there he lay, forgotten and unmourned, in the trampled, frozen snow; and a big brown skua gull on vast pinions, who had only just arrived to nest there too, and ravage and plunder what he could get, saw the still little body from far aloft, and came sweeping round, rocking, as the pirate schooners used to lay rocking when the merchantman heaved to, on rigid extended wings. Anon down he came, and the rush and furling of his great wings made a loud *h-r-r-r* in that cold air; made, too, a draft that played upon our penguin's outstretched body.

And our penguin moved.

The big, cruel, hook-beaked skua started and stood still. His cold eyes, first one, then the other, fixed upon the prostrate form. The blood he could see. Indeed it was the carmine stain on the white that had flashed to his trebly sharp eyes, trained to look for that mark of trouble; but—well, the penguin *had* moved.

Still, a quick hack at the eyes might do it. After all, a penguin without eyes would be anybody's prey, in spite of his lion courage.

But could he do it? Dare he? Besides, he half suspected a ruse; and in five seconds of hesitation the chance was gone. Our penguin lifted his weary head and stared, half-blinded.

Then the skua attacked, in skirmishing order so to speak; but he had lost his initial advantage, and although with any other bird in such straits it might not have counted, with the penguin it did.

Slowly, falteringly, the little, odd, fat, wingless bird struggled to his feet; and there was still fire in the unforgettable eye—the other was bunged up—as he squared up for battle.

The skua used his wings for weapons—surprizing enough, too, since his beak and claws were designed for murder—and twice the penguin fell, though whether from weakness, or wings, was hard to say. He gained strength, though, and the skua's courage oozed away as he gained it, till finally with a run forward and a *how-how* of wings he took flight, and removed to look for easier prey.

The penguin reeled down the slope and sank in a sheltered hollow, where he stayed, frozen or dead for all one could tell, alone and as still as a rock for a very, very long time.

Night came, and day, and night, and just after the next dawning our penguin appeared again, walking stiffly and sturdily up that slope. He swerved neither to the right nor to the left. He looked at nobody. He was strong now, and recovered, and a force to be reckoned with. His courage we have already shown was above proof, recovered or not.

He seemed to know quite well beforehand where he was going, and he went there—to the spot where his lady love that might have been was when he left her, and, he knew, would, short of an accident, be now.

He found them, the pair of them, her and her lover. Things did not at first sight seem a scrap altered in the interval. There she squatted in the shallow she had scraped for her nest. There he stood, white as a gravestone, if looked at from in front, beside her. Only, a little pile of stones had been built up round her. That was the difference—a real nest.

Our penguin wasted neither time, nor words, nor did he hurry. He just marched straight up to that nest.

Neither of the other two moved an inch, not a fraction of an inch, not an eye-lid. They just stared straight at him, or past him, with their strange golliwog-like mien, and he—he bowed before *her*.

And that did it.

HE HAD just time, and only just time, to straighten up after that bow, to meet his rival, who hurled himself upon him like a thing gone mad. He knew—that husband—well enough, the grim law of the penguins that "he may take who has the power, and he may keep who can." Now he had to abide by it, and—make good if he could.

The little chap seemed confident enough, and his temper would not have shamed a lion, nor his courage a bulldog; but there was one thing he overlooked, and that was that our penguin straight from two grim and bitter battles, and our penguin straight from a long rest, were two very different propositions; very, very different indeed.

All the penguins who had begun to nest, or hoped to soon, and had pegged down claims upon that bit of rising ground—and it looked like the vicinity of Dawson City in its palmiest days—must have cursed those two cock penguins and all their works for several generations; for that battle began at dawn, and by the afternoon it had made havoc of the nests it raged over, and the love-making, home-building it cut in upon, to say nothing of the portly individuals it barged into, during those hours. Many times it had caused a riot, and more than once a general uprising of outraged claim-holders, who set upon the combatants indiscriminately and drove them forth.

But it made no difference. Nothing made any difference. They just kept on, except when they couldn't from sheer exhaustion, when they just lay down and gasped as if their great little hearts would break, till returning wind gave them new strength, and they staggered to their feet to wade into it again. Oh, it was a scrumptious scrap, a glorious fight of indomitable gladiators, a battle of giant hearts that didn't know there was such a word as surrender.

By the time afternoon came they were not the same gallants who began the great fight so many hours before. Blood clotted their beaks, their funny eyes were swollen and nearly hidden, and their beautiful white fronts were smothered in blood, and mire, and muck; but their honor remained unsoiled utterly, and they were apparently just as far from giving in as when they began. What is one to say of such heroic little birds without wings? This: The nation that takes them for crest and lives up to it will be the king nation of the world.

At last, 'way along toward night, there came a time when both birds went down together, and—stayed down. Neither rose. Neither moved even, neither could move. They were done utterly, done, down, and out. Flesh and blood could obey the indomitable courage no longer. To all intents and purposes they were dead.

Time passed—hours. Every one seemed to have forgotten the two poor dark bodies lying there so still and blood-stained, side by side in the snow. Corpses they seemed to be, carrion, and had the hour been other than it was, probably the cruel corsair skua gulls would have thought so too and dined.

But they were not dead. Oh, no; not yet at least, not dead yet.

At length one swollen, bloody head uprose, swayed, and dropped. But it lifted again, higher and higher, and a draggled body followed it; the bird tottered gropingly to it feet, and stood swaying—our penguin!

A pause followed. Then, almost pitching on to his beak at every stride, he staggered away blindly.

And—good Heavens!—what was that? A second head, a body, rising, reeling, falling, rising again, and blundering away, too, in the wake of the first—the other penguin.

But where were they going? They knew—though how, wonderful Nature, who made them, alone can tell—for they could scarce see. They were heading straight toward the nest, stumbling, groping, pathetic and strange figures staggering across the snow.

And so they came to her, battered and ghastly lovers, one behind the other. Penguins no longer, but horrible offenses to the sight, came they through the twilight of midnight.

And there she sat, couched down in her nest, all neat, and clean, and soft, and—but——

Ah, merciless Nature, what was that motionless white form glimmering by her side? Who the bird that stood there, unsoiled, unbreathed, erect? Thou traitress! It was another cock penguin—another husband!

Slowly that ghastly march of the two heroic gladiators struggled forward; and he the usurper, and she the traitress watched them come, immovable, heartless, untouched; watched those blind things blundering, groping through the twilight back, back to—*her*.

It was a fair distance for a charge. The ground was quite smooth between. He could not make any mistake. He made none. That interloper penguin—who last season had been no more than an unmarried murderer of lost-baby penguins—charged.

You see him, a vision of black-and-white, thudding across the snow—that brute who had fought no fight for a wife yet.

Down went our penguin, squaring up and offering battle bravely, in the first rush—down, helpless and hopeless, there to be pounded and hammered and thumped and smashed and stamped almost out of recognition into the snow.

Then round sprang the interloper and hurled straight at the second pathetic apology for a penguin; and down that bird went, too, there to be battered like his rival, and he lay helpless and half-dead, almost into nothing at all.

NEXT morning—how, one can not tell—news ran through the nesting-grounds of the penguins that the ice was cracking, that great breaks of open water were appearing here and there, and that even now the waves could be felt wriggling in under the floes from the open sea. Summer had come, the short, cold Summer of those lands, which even so was no more than a lesser Winter.

Such news they receive in a besieged city when it is known that a great army is marching to their rescue. The long fast was over, and the great dirt over. Henceforward penguins could go to sea, the sea that was their realm, and eat to their fill; henceforth in the waves they could wash and be clean with the spotless cleanliness that, it seems, only sea birds know.

And then it was, in the bright sunshine, in the bitter wind, the crowds of penguins—nearly all cocks—hurrying down in long lines to the water beheld a strange sight, and a pathetic one.

Slowly, dumbly, blindly, one behind the other, but otherwise alone and all forlorn, staggering in their gait like drunken men, caked with filth and blood, scarce recognizable as penguins or any other living things, toddled falteringly the two gladiators—straight down to the sea.

Down over the rough beaches they stumbled; in and out among the high hummocks of piled ice alongshore they crept, falling often; across the smooth terraces at the bottom of the cliffs they flopped, and away out over the flat sea ice to the water they reeled, almost arm in arm now, or flipper in flipper, as strange and ghastly a pair as ever shamed the light of day. On and on they struggled, instinctively heading to the sea, to the edge of the ice, and almost helplessly, half-falling, half-diving, they collapsed into the green waters.

And then—and then— Came a swirl up out of the depths, a chain and seethe of bursting bubbles, a frill of foam; and there broke the surface a head, wet, blunt-muzzled, bristling, bloated and flat—a horrible, great, cruel head, a nightmare visage of the deep; and behind and below, dimly seen and guessed, a vast shadowy body, a huge, bloated, and swaying ghost-like shape, some ten and a half feet long beneath the surface.

Followed a hiss of waters, a foam-flecked rush; the huge jaws opened, disclosing an array of fangs and teeth to make you shudder—opened beneath one of the gladiators as he swam, and shut upon him. There was a pause. Then again the rush, again the great swirl, again the opening of those cavernous jaws, and again the awful wrenching clash as they shut, and—there were no gladiators at all.

They had gone in a breath, without sound except for the wet, hollow noises of the water; they had vanished forever into the ever ravening, relentless maw of the mighty sea leopard, the great leopard seal of the natural-history books, the terror of the Antarctic, the wolf of the ice-floes, the abiding nightmare of every penguin that ever pips an egg.

And so they died, those two lion-hearted rivals, those heroic ones, those great little gladiators, side by side, and friends at last in death.

FOGS

by Bill Adams

IT IS a wet morning, dense with dripping blankets of ghostly fog. What can a man write of upon a foggy morning?

Well—I don't just know. The day is dreary beyond words; and the air is still—with no bird breaking the silence. All things appear to be hushed in a gloom.

This seems somewhat absurd though.

Above the fog I have no doubt that birds are contentedly flying, the sun upon the flutter of their pretty wings—thinking perhaps of hidden places, known to them, in the silence of the fog below, where, in but a little time, they will build their nests.

It is a curious thing how a man, and even a big man, can let the fogs depress him, isn't it? It is curious to think that a bird can shrill a whistle while a man's heart can be heavy.

Yesterday I was pruning an orange-tree; meeting as I did so a little insect who came strolling around from the other side of the branch.

"Hello, you little son of a gun," said I. "Who do you reckon you are anyway?"

The bug in question deliberately stuck his head up, a little on one side, and took a good look at me.

I regret to state that he seemed to think but little of me. Turning his bug back upon me, with cool deliberation, he departed to some secret place amidst the branches where he would not be bothered by sight of such as I.

Well—I ask you——

Can it be that the bugs, who may at any moment be eaten by a bird, have more sense than I have?

Can it be that the birds, whistling above the fog, have more sense than I?

The bug is powerless—the bird at the mercy of the hawk.

Man is the only thing upon the face of earth who has eyes to see beyond the troublous fogs. Isn't that so—mental eyes?

Well—if a man can let the temporary fogs of the old earth's troubles depress him he must be after all not much more than a bird or a bug.

I presume that that bug, who yesterday so deliberately turned his bug back on me, did so because he saw that I, a man, with no cause for care since the world is all my own, considered himself a better imitation of a man than I.

The bird and the bug are devoured by the hungry hunter—and are gone.

Man's soul is his own—and it is up to him to make it a highly indigestible piece of goods for any trouble that would be apt to assail it.

Am I right?

On—the fog is thinning and the sun comes through.

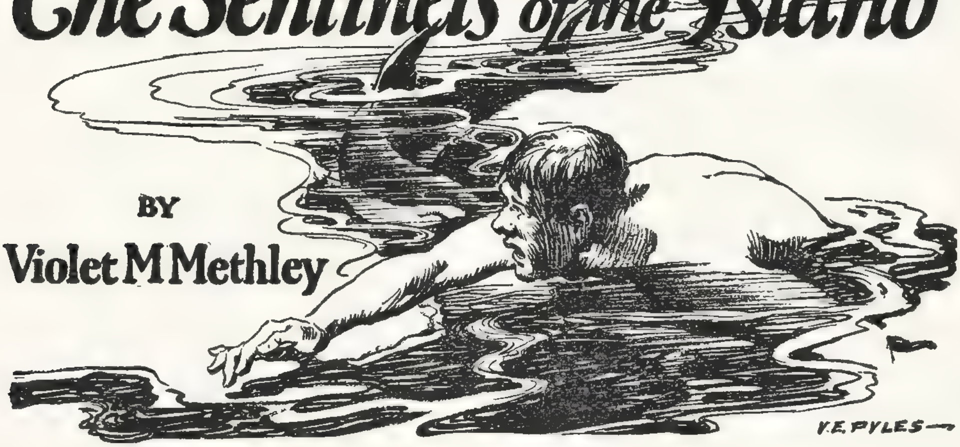
Cheer-oh!

"Fogs," copyright, 1922, by B. M. Adams.

The Sentinels of the Island

BY

Violet M Methley



Author of "The Breath of Hell"

ON THE one side of the water, heaven; on the other side, hell. And in between—but that comes later.

Terry Cregeen crouched by the edge of the water, where the swathes of dark-brown seaweed had drifted with the tide. One hand plucked at his lip, dragging it downward from the clenched teeth; the other delved ceaselessly in the shell-powdered sand. His eyes, dark and tormented, stared away to the mainland.

But Pascoe, sitting upright, awkward and uneasy, for the most part watched the other man's face. His own heavy and indeterminate features expressed little; some people thought, in consequence, that he had nothing to express.

Pascoe's eyes dwelt on the younger man's wretched face with dreary wistfulness. It was his fault; that was the thought which his slow-moving brain had caught and retained. Through him, young Terry Cregeen had joined the gang of horse-stealers, to be arrested some six months after Pascoe had begun to serve his own time of imprisonment. Through him, Kathleen, the boy's girl-wife, had fallen sick of very grief. Through him, it seemed that she would die.

All this the Cornishman felt, yet could find no words to express. He glanced up dully as Terry started to his feet with a half-stifled groan.

"I'll go. I'll risk—anything—to get to her!" he gasped.

"Don't be a madman!" Pascoe spoke with heavy deliberation as he, too, rose. "What good would it do her if you killed yourself? And that's all it means."

"Faith, she'd be less lonely if we were both dead together!"

The reckless laugh rang out horribly on the still, hot air. A white-winged seabird echoed it, swooping down beside the two men.

Terry strode down to where the long, lazy swells lapped his very feet.

"It's less than a quarter of a mile across," he muttered. "Perhaps the warders aren't always watching. I could swim it. And there's Jim Holloway's hut not a mile away in the bush on the other side. He'd lend me a horse and all I needed to escape."

Before Pascoe could answer, a uniformed man came down from the sand-ridge behind them, musket tilted under his arm.

"Here, you fellows, back to quarters," he said roughly. "Remember, time's up half an hour earlier tonight. There's inspection."

The prisoners turned in sullen obedience and walked before him toward the blistered, white-washed buildings beyond the rim of sand-dunes. The prison, long, low and wall-surrounded, was the only habitation upon the square mile of Loumoura Island. Ridges of sand-hills, with an unshaven look by reason of their tufts of grayish tea-bush, a solitary clump of blue-green eucalyptus—these were all the natural beauties of the place. To south, east and west, sea—blue and very lonely. To the north, the mainland, beyond the intervening ribbon of water. Ridges of sand-hills there again; but further inland, the weird, spectral bush—and freedom.

And yet only one prisoner had ever attempted that way of escape and the tale of his failure would never be heard from his lips by living man.

As Cregeen and Pascoe made their sullen way toward the open door of the prison yard, a couple of warders carrying between them a heavy-seeming basket passed down to a wooden jetty, which ran for some little distance into the strait of sea.

Arrived at the end, they set down their burden with a grunt of relief and proceeded to unload it. With businesslike rapidity they dragged out its unsavory contents.

One of the men flung out a mass of offal, with the full swing of his arm, and even as it touched the water a black triangle clove through the smooth ripples, a dark, shadowy something turned beneath the surface, there was a shimmer of white—and the lump of meat was gone.

Scarcely sixty seconds had passed, yet it seemed that out of nowhere a vast multitude had assembled, peopling the waters. A score of shapes gathered to the feast which the warders flung for them, jostling each other in fierce, terrible rivalry.

The last chunk of meat had fallen from the basket on to the planks of the jetty and one of the men sent it over the edge with a thrust of his foot. Immediately there came a swift cleavage of the water just below him—the shimmer of lifting whiteness and the glimpse of a trap-like mouth.

Then the two warders turned away and came back along the pier, with their empty basket. That job was over for twenty-four hours. The sentinels of the island had received their daily meal, the pay which retained them in the service of the Government to guard the one way of escape.

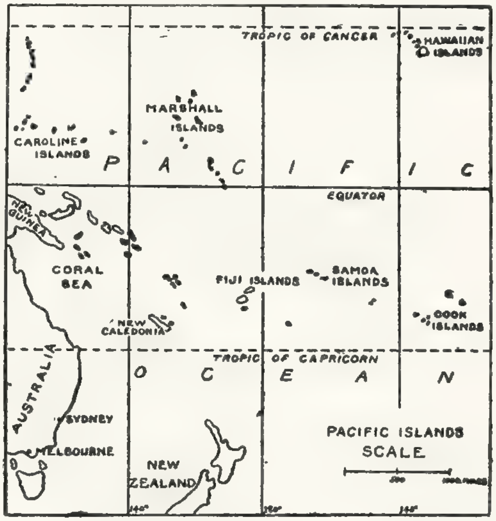
The sight was new to Terry Cregeen. He had made a half-turn and paused for a moment as if fascinated. At his elbow Bart Pascoe muttered, under his breath—

"Didn't I say that you'd be a fool to think of escape?"

The warder stood at a short distance, fingering his musket with a grim smile. He allowed his charges to gaze their fill. After all, it was a good object-lesson.

Yet, in spite of that sight, in spite of Pascoe's warning, Terry Cregeen thought of escape still, thought of nothing else for hour after hour of a stifling, sleepless night, as he sat on the edge of his plank bed with the pulses beating in his forehead like strokes on an anvil.

Kathleen was dying—Katheen, whose life was his, whom he could save with the clasp of his arms, the touch of his lips—Oh, he knew it, past a doubt!



Haggard and wan, he went about his toil next day, staring at his fellows with the eyes of a racked and tortured man.

Pascoe watched him and something of remorseful pity stirred his dull, expressionless face, his vague, blue eyes. But he knew himself helpless; his slow-moving mind could contrive no plan of any profit.

THE hour came when the prisoners were allowed to wander unhampered, almost unwatched. Terry walked the sands like a fretted panther, his eyes ever turned to the land of desire beyond the dividing strait. Pascoe fell into step beside him, dumb, and cursing his own dumbness, with something of a dog's pitiful impotence in his eyes.

It was a vivid blue and white day, full of sun and wind. The oily ripples of yesterday broke in creamy surf on the beach. Fresh, sepia-brown swathes of seaweed lay at the feet of the prisoners, left there by the retreating tide. The sharp, salt smell rose to their nostrils.

It was a day of life—and death. The

reminder came in a black, glistening triangle of fin, breaking the surface of the sea, and another—and another.

Pascoe pointed them out dumbly to his companion. He read desperation in Terry's eyes and felt the imminent need of some reminder.

"I'm past caring," the Irishman muttered. "I shall risk it, Bart, by heaven I shall! Better to be dead than alive—like this!"

They had reached a shallow bay from which nothing was visible save the strip of water before them and the sand-hills at their back. The prison was hidden and there was no living creature in sight—except the ever-watchful guardians of the sea-way.

Suddenly Terry stopped short, as he swished through a wet mass of kelp, with the pods clopping under the pressure of his heavy shoes—stopped short—and laughed.

Pascoe's dull eyes showed a glint of amazement. He stood still, open-mouthed.

"I've seen a way—a way to escape, Bart—for me, and maybe for you as well, if you're game. Anyhow, for me."

"What d'you mean?"

"It would take half the day to explain to you, and the other half to make you act—Oh, I know you, old fellow, don't I?—and 'tis a question of minutes, not hours."

Terry laughed aloud like a boy, for very lightness of heart, and his fingers ran deftly up the buttons of his shirt. Almost before another question could formulate itself in Pascoe's brain, much less trickle from his lips, the other stood stripped before him, his prison clothes in a heap at his feet. Then, at last, Pascoe spoke.

"You—you're going to try to swim it?" he gasped. "It's just—death—Terry—not a chance, nor the shadow of one."

He caught at the younger man's bare arm, and the grip of his fingers left a mark on the naked flesh. Terry jerked himself away with an oath.

"Be careful, you fool! Listen to me, and keep a cool head, if you can. There's far more than a shadow of a chance if you'll help me. See here!"

Cregeen flung himself down upon a pile of kelp and began to draw the slippery masses about him with quick, skilful fingers.

"Help me, man!" he repeated. "Can't you understand?"

"I—I—no!" Pascoe was on his knees, his face working with amazement.

"Look out to sea there—at the weed floating—mightn't any of those trusses hide a man? And there's one that will, please God and the saints!"

"You mean to float across, covered in the weed?"

"Right, at the first guess! You're coming on, Bart! That's what I mean, just that and nothing else. Help me to cover myself."

"But those brutes—they'll smell you out."

"They may—and, if so, there's an end, and a quick one. They may not—and that's the chance I'm taking. Help me, I say."

In five minutes Cregeen lay on the sand, a swathed and shapeless mummy of kelp, bound about and tied with cunning knotting of the weed. He had kept some measure of freedom for his feet and hands, just sufficient to let a good swimmer paddle himself through the water, lying on his back, with lips above the surface.

It was an adventure so daring that even the reckless Irishman would scarcely have attempted it after an hour of consideration. But he had considered it for just ten minutes—and there was a bare chance of success.

"There's something still to be done," Terry's voice sounded strangely through his shapeless disguise. "Bury my clothes in the sand—quick! Then even if a warder comes in sight, he may suspect nothing."

Pascoe obeyed in silence. As he rose, after the completion of the task, his eyes sought the sea, and a gleam of hope lit their dullness.

"Terry," he said. "They're feeding those devils. It'll maybe keep them away for a bit."

" 'Tis the blessed Virgin herself has given me this moment," the Irishman ejaculated. "Quick—help me to get into the water."

Slowly, with Pascoe's help, he rolled down to the wet rim of the sea, where the tide had left a shining band as it retreated.

"I'll be carried out through the surf if I let myself drift," Terry said. "Then I'll paddle, bit by bit, to the other side. It's no distance, Bart, after all. I'll do it—by heaven, I'll do it! And if I succeed, you'll follow me—if it doesn't take you the rest of your sentence to make your mind up to it!"

Pascoe shook his head slowly.

"No, I shan't follow you," he said. "I'd never have the pluck. Those devils out there give me the horrors. I'd rather die a clean, shore death."

"You've a funny way of encouragement!" Terry's laugh sounded queerly from that brown mass of weed at Pascoe's feet. "Well, I'll waste no more time."

A WARDER strode to the crest of the sand-hill behind them some five minutes later. He saw Pascoe standing alone at the edge of the sea, gazing away to the mainland. There was nothing unusual to be seen—at least by the warder's eyes. He turned and passed on toward the prison. That poor devil of a Cornishman need not be shepherded in yet.

And Pascoe stood there regardless of everything but a mass of seaweed, which showed just above the surface of the water, more than halfway across to the mainland. As he watched, with strained and aching eyes, he saw how the truss of kelp moved onward—slowly—slowly.

Now, three-quarters of the way was overpast—and then, of a sudden, a black fin reft the water, coming up swiftly from the eastward. The regular meal was over, but it seemed not likely that the appetite of those unclean things was satisfied.

Yet they might not guess what strange presence lurked in that commonplace mass of weed, moving so slowly toward safety. Might not—but Pascoe dreaded the unknown, ungaged instincts which lurk in the lower orders of brutes. In his mind there had never been much hope of escape.

But the triangle swept past—and returned. Now it was quite close, passing and repassing. And others joined the first, until half a dozen circled near.

Their intelligence had divined that there was something strange about that shifting mass of kelp. Curiosity drew them nearer—ever nearer.

And Pascoe stood on the extreme verge of the sea, with the waves breaking at his feet, and stared at those circling fins, sick with horror. Because of his intense fear of such a death, he divined what that other must be suffering, floating supine there in the water and waiting—waiting for——

Pascoe dashed his hands to his eyes.

It was his fault—his fault. He looked up again. Those terrible shapes were a little nearer now; more in numbers also. The mass of seaweed which covered Cregeen lay motionless on the water, but the Cornishman with an instinct which was, for him, almost inspired, knew what Terry was enduring, almost could have prayed for the end to come swiftly—as he knew that the other was praying.

For there was no hope. In a few moments now, at most, those grim, silent guardians would have discovered the secret, and then—they would fulfil the office for which they were subsidized.

Unless— It came like a blinding flash, a thought which made Pascoe whiten and stagger where he stood. It was as if his whole mind, unused to such rapid motion, turned giddy. But the faintness passed, and the thought remained, clear enough now, and strengthened to purpose.

Stooping, Pascoe removed his shoes; then, without an instant of hesitation, he strode forward, knee-deep, breast-deep—until he was swimming out, straight toward that swathe of weed, those sinister, lurking shapes.

The sea glittered under the sun in a million diamond-points; through the dazzling light Pascoe saw how the black fins changed their direction. The monstrous sentinels had deserted that queer puzzlement, which, as yet, they did not fully understand, and, therefore, vaguely feared, for something concrete—something the meaning of which they grasped.

And now Pascoe turned and began to swim back toward the shore, which he had left for ever. He knew that he was too late to save himself, but, at least, he could gain more time for Terry. Very swiftly, cleaving the water into ripples, the black triangles followed him gaining with every foot.

A horror-struck warder reached the beach in time to see something of what passed—too late to help. He reported at the prison that Pascoe and Cregeen had attempted to escape by sea—and failed.

On the beach beyond the narrow strait of water, a floating swathe of seaweed stranded, lay motionless for an instant, then began to move. A naked man emerged from the sticky coils and went staggering and creeping over the sand-hills until he reached the shelter of the bush.

Incoherent thanks to Mary and the saints bubbled from his lips. Surely it was they who had driven the sharks away, when all hope seemed gone—when he had felt the brutes nosing at his body. He had heard nothing, seen nothing, knew no more than that one moment they were there and the next—gone.

He turned in the outskirts of the bush for one more look at the island and the low, white buildings, then plunged in among the trees toward Holloway's hut, where he could find certain help and the means to reach Kathleen in time.

His thoughts strayed once to Pascoe. He found himself wondering whether the Cornishman would ever dare to attempt his way of escape.

Probably not. Pascoe was an arrant coward where those devils of sharks were concerned.

THE MYTH-MAKERS

by Hugh Pendexter

THE Spaniards were not the only race to visualize the New World as a wonderland of rich mines and beautiful cities. They sought the Fountain of Youth and the gold of El Dorado. But throughout the sixteenth and for the first half of the seventeenth centuries adventurers of various races were fully as credulous.

As early as 1700 the belief that the continent was peopled by the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel was asserted. It was also believed that the Great Lakes opened into the "Straits of Anian," which were supposed to connect Hudson Bay with the Pacific Ocean. Some years later French traders and trappers "discovered" a linguistic affinity between tribes of the Sioux nation and the Chinese. As the ancestry of the Indian was variously explained, each theory carried with it the mechanical skill and cunning of the parent people. If descended from the Chinese the aborigines must be wonderful artificers; and although found always living by agriculture and the chase there were cities gilded with gold just beyond unknown mountains, and so on, wherever nimble fancy led.

There was Norumbega, as the Penobscot River in Maine was called. This name also included the mythical kingdom extending from the coast to the head of the Penobscot, with the fabulous city of Norumbega located where Bangor now stands. Dwarfs and giants lived there in much splendor, and Champlain went to investigate and found the Abnaki wigwams.

All these various yarns fell in nicely with John Law's scheme, popularly known as "the Mississippi Company." In the literature and maps booming that enterprise Louisiana was represented as being embarrassingly crowded with rich mines. The English map-maker Moll in 1720 pictured the country west of the Mississippi as being "full of mines."

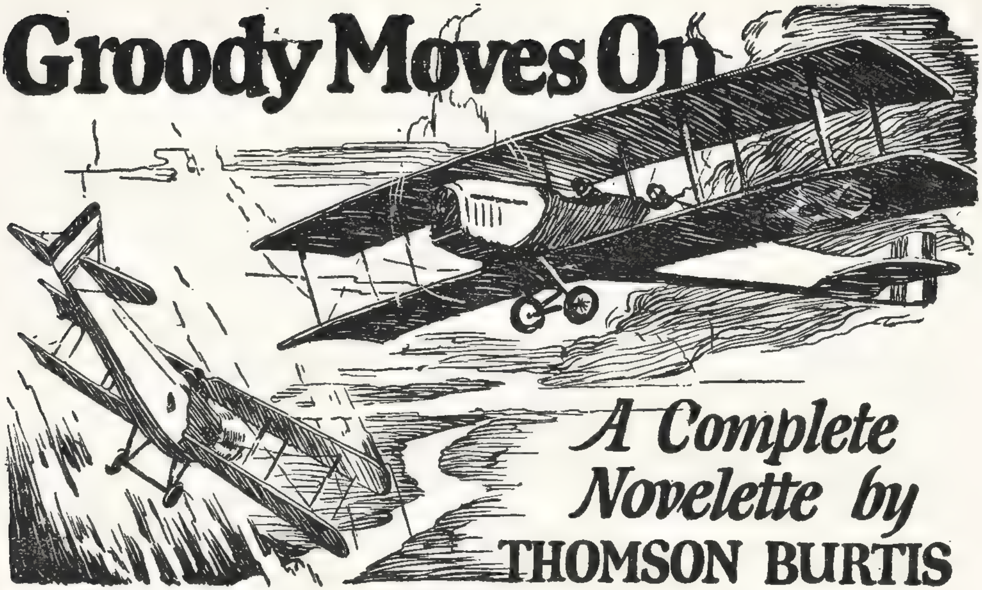
It was these mythical mines—"the Mines of Marameg"—that proved the undoing of Law's scheme. Had the speculators in Quinquempoix been less avaricious and permitted Law's canny Scot mind to work out his plans there were rich returns to be had in the virgin Louisiana country. But the press-agents did their work too well. No tales were too extravagant and ridiculous to be believed. Each fresh crop of yarns incited the speculators to dump in their money. No one would listen to an attractive dividend from prosaic resources. Mines, and more mines, were demanded, and although they existed only on paper they became so popular as to break the bubble.

But this gigantic fiasco in no way caused the Old World to discredit the fabulous riches of the New. The Swiss sought land in Virginia and "beyond the Potomac," where rich mines were confidently believed to be awaiting the first comers.

As late as 1753 The River of the West was shown on Jefferys' map, flowing from Lake Winnipeg to the Pacific Ocean. And the rich imaginations that created this mighty stream were not slow to give it suitable fittings. This river flowed through New Albion, as Drake named it, and comprised everything west of the Mississippi River. Drake said the country was surrendered to him by "the king."

Mountains of gold and cities of wondrous loveliness, pearls and precious stones—all these were ever just over the horizon. Not until after the French-Indian War did the people fully realize that their gold must be won from prairies and the forest, and their cities be built by their own hands.

Groody Moves On



A Complete Novelette by
THOMSON BURTIS

Author of "Explain It Yourself," "Flying Cannon," etc.

THE tall, disconnected form sprawled negligently over the bed moved slightly. The heel of one boot slipped off the newspaper which had been guarding the purity of the coverlet, and smeared the blanket with dust. The afternoon sun splotched the floor of the small room irregularly, its heat tempered somewhat by the Gulf breeze which stirred the curtains at the wide-open windows.

Groody's eyes opened slightly, and surveyed the beaverboard ceiling with hostility. He wiped away the perspiration which beaded his brow, and wondered why he should be oppressed with a feeling of approaching disaster. His chronic state of dissatisfaction was now real depression.

Finally the reason came to him. Through the dark-brown feeling which pervades the being of an unaccustomed afternoon napper after awakening, permeated the recollection that he had been roped in on Colonel and Mrs. Mills' dinner-party that evening—caught and bound securely without a chance for escape. And Groody's desire to be a parlor athelete was non-existent. He hated social affairs with a hatred which passeth understanding except among the vanishing cohorts of stagdom.

His lath-like body turned on the bed, and he peered morosely out over the flying-field. Shimmering heat waves danced over the mile-square expanse of Donovan Field, and above—cottony billows of fleecy mist marched majestically across the flawless blue of a Texas sky.

A piercing whistle, indicating a feeling of contentment and satisfaction which was a characteristic of Bob Forsythe's, heralded the approach of that chubby young sharer in the quarters of First Lieutenant Groody. Forsythe was perspiring profusely, which he did without cessation all through the summer months, but he marched up the walk briskly, clattered into the living-room, and thence proceeded directly into Groody's boudoir.

He eyed the thin, hawk-like countenance on the bed with disapproval.

"Why the wo?" he inquired.

"Among the three or four thousand reasons that come to mind, the colonel's dinner-party occurs to me first," stated Groody.

Forsythe chuckled as he finished the job of removing his black tie and exposing his fat brown throat to the open air.

"Caught, eh? The last of the herd has been corralled. I should think the prospect of meeting the famous star of the moving pictures, Miss Polly Clare, would cause your ears to flap with anticipation. Now I——"

The roar of an air-plane motor, which had been a far-away undertone, became a reverberating drone which made conversation impossible. A big De Haviland swooped over the hangar opposite the window, leveled out a foot above the ground, and finally landed in a series of graceful leaps and bounds.

"Four bounces. Must be a lieutenant-colonel," observed Groody. He threw his long, booted legs over the side of the bed, and ran his fingers through his already highly-tousled brown hair.

"——, I wish something would happen," he said. "Outside of pink teas and instructing dumb-bell cadets," he added.

"If you will be a hero you must also play the dual rôle of lion," Forsythe told him, his round face beaming. "Now the next time two expendable aviators get caught by Mexican bandits and held for ransom, maybe you'll have too much sense to land when you spot the party, fight said thugs with your machine-gun, rescue the perishing flyers, and fly them back to the U. S. full of glory and bullets. Then our leading tea-hounds won't pester you with invitations, movie queens won't give you a tumble, newspapermen won't——"

"Your brain is paralyzed and your tongue has the St. Vitus' dance," Groody interrupted judicially, and flopped back wearily on the bed.

His long, narrow eyes, screened by drooping lids, were mere slits in his lean, mahogany-tinted face. From the corners of the jutting, beak-like nose two deeply-graven lines ran to the ends of the cleanly-lined mouth. One of the lines, just before reaching its destination, had abandoned a straight course and curved outward, which lent a distinctly sardonic cast to Groody's countenance.

"Well, do me credit while you're out among 'em," directed Forsythe, easing his ample form out of the chair. "I must dress for the city."

"Going to inundate San Antone with your presence this evening, I presume."

"Right."

Forsythe disappeared into his own room singing cheerfully a ribald ditty. Groody resumed his disgusted survey of the flying-field, the endless line of huge white hangars which rimmed its northern edge, and the procession of trucks and passenger vehicles passing up and down the macadam road separating the mile-long array of quarters from the parallel rows of air-plane sheds.

The periodic restlessness which had been the dominating force in his life for fifteen years was seething within him. Every feature of the panorama before his eyes galled him. What he had done today, what he would do tomorrow and the day after presented no features of interest or merit. He was sick of the sameness of the routine and of the daily air grind with eager, clumsy cadets.

"Thousands of miles of world, a few odd wars, a flock of ships galloping around the seven seas, and I pick Donovan Field!" he soliloquized bitterly.

It had been inevitable that he should join the Foreign Legion at the start of the war, and almost as forgone a conclusion that as soon as he could cajole, fight, beg and threaten his way into the French Air Service he would do so. He had traveled from Shanghai, where he happened to be at the time, to Brest, mostly as a stoker, in 1914, and 1916 found him in the Air Service of the French army.

The next year marked his transfer into the aerial corps of his own country. The armistice was signed while he was in a hospital at Tours, getting over a two-thousand-foot spin into the ground with his motor afire and a few bullet-holes complicating matters. He lay in the hospital a year, pointed out to visitors as a flyer with twelve official Huns.

He had been cleverly lulled into a state of contentment which had caused him to stay in the army, he reflected, by being assigned to the Air Service border-patrol along the Rio Grande immediately upon his arrival in the States. The border was one of the inhabited strips of the globe which was comparatively new to him, and he had enjoyed it. There was sporadic excitement there with smugglers and bandits; and Tia Juana, Juarez, Nueva Laredo, Matamoras—all held possibilities of wassail and occasional soul-satisfying opportunities of a belligerent tinge.

Then the powers that be had decided that the men who for many months had been tooling their big De Havilands over the mountains and deserts and mesquite-covered bad-lands which stretch from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of California ought to have a taste of the flesh-pots of civilization. They had been living in sand-strewn tents, their tiny airdromes mere cleared spots in the wilderness, mostly. So the border men from Marfa and Sanderson and Laredo were sent to Donovan Field, close to the effete pleasures of San Antonio.

Likewise, they could fly there without gambling their lives against their big twelve-cylinder Liberty motors. Down on the border there were no landing fields. If a man saved himself in the inevitable crack-up which a forced landing meant, he usually had a long ramble without food or water to look forward to.

Therefore, Donovan Field for Groody, and the return of that lust for variety, action, which had driven him up and down the earth.

He was through, he decided, rolling off the bed and stretching mightily. He would cable and find out whether the Kosciusko Squadron in Poland needed a flyer. He didn't much care whether they did or not. He was about through with flying. That he was such an air-man as is born once in a lifetime meant nothing to him. Deep down in his heart he knew that his exploits as a combat-instructor at Issouden were still the talk of most of the flyers who had passed through that huge training center, but it brought him no satisfaction. Not the remnant of a kick remained.

The western sky was a riot of color, ranging from softest pink to deepest crimson. It was time to start dressing for the boredom of the evening. Forsythe, having ceased to sing falsetto, must have vacated the bathtub. He always sang in a screeching false soprano while bathing. Groody started throwing off his clothes, depositing them absently in divers corners of the room, while his mind ranged from Port Said to Nagasaki, finding a measure of relief from present monotony in past experience.

He shaved and bathed languidly, his mind far from his work. His restless discontent was like some physical pain. He was not introspective, but nevertheless he realized dimly the possible significance of the urge within him which seemed to be growing stronger with the years. Vaguely he felt that it might mean failure and tragedy at the end of the trail with the thing which makes for permanent happiness irretrievably lost. The idea made no particular impression on him, nor did it lessen the measure of his desire.

Stalking back to his room with a disreputable brown bathrobe flapping around his thin, straight shanks, he threw open the closet-door and gazed with disapproval at the uniforms within. Hours of perspiring discomfort, trussed up in clothing designed for an Arctic explorer, loomed ahead.

The process of easing himself into the complicated army harness was a leisurely one, frequently interrupted by intervals of several minutes when he sat on the edge of the bed and smoked his long, thin cigar reflectively. His mind was ranging eagerly, like a hound which scents some far-off, vaguely exciting thing. In his moments of brooding his face was more bitterly saturnine than ever. There had been a time when Groody's countenance reflected tolerant cynicism, but with the passing of the years it was hardening.

Despite a reasonable amount of care, the air-man's completed toilet was somewhat casual. He did not trouble to pin his row of decorations on the blouse, which left the pin-pricks where the ribbons had been very obvious. His uniform fitted well, but somehow the wrinkles in the boots, the set of the blouse collar, the slightly-tilted cap—all contributed to an appearance of careless disregard for the stiff perfection which is the last word in military smartness.

With a fresh cigar drooping from the corner of his mouth he set off through the swiftly deepening twilight. His lanky body moved loose-jointedly. Groody was a natural lounger.

The road stretched in a perfectly straight gray line ahead, the sheer white of the regular lines of buildings on either side looming dimly. Lights winked on incessantly. The far edges of the great flying-field were blurred in ever-thickening shadow, and the purple sky was already studded with glowing stars. Groody smoked slowly, and hated it all.

A MAJORITY of the Mills' guests had already foregathered in the colonel's quarters. Being the commanding-officer of the field, his quarters approximated a certain degree of spaciousness and comfort.

The conversation turned naturally to Groody—he had not arrived yet, and he presented the most potential topic of common interest. The epidemic of matrimony which had swept Donovan Field had left very few surviving bachelors, and as a result of Groody's recent achievement in the salvaging of two border flyers who had been captured by a small band of Mexican renegades, Mrs. Mills had selected him as the most impressive escort for the famous Polly Clare, who was a lioness corralled with considerable difficulty.

"—and, my dears, a few months ago he inherited ten thousand dollars from an uncle, and he took a four month's leave immediately. When he returned—nobody knows where he went—they say he didn't have any of it left. He——"

Colonel Mills' square tanned face broke into a wide grin.

"I met him on the street in San Antonio the night he arrived, and he borrowed a dollar of me," he chuckled. "I asked him whether the hotels had stopped cashing checks for him, and he said that any check he cashed wouldn't be good."

Major Sims, whose fat red face was garnished with a flowing white mustache, caught the eye of the tall, raven-haired beauty who was the guest of honor.

"Just a month ago the Secretary of War was here, and there was a big dinner scheduled at the club in his honor—subscribed for your seats, and all that sort of thing. The club barber had once worked on a ship Groody had sailed on, and Groody invited him to have dinner with him that night. You should have seen the faces of some of the wives when Groody, with that lopsided grin of his, sat down at his table with the barber!"

Miss Clare, whose father was a prominent truck-man in Brooklyn, New York, took another sip of her *aguadiente* cocktail and shuddered delicately.

"He must be a barbarian," she said languidly.

She put down her glass, maintaining her fingers out-thrust in a genteel manner until the very last.

"Personally, I don't think he's the proper type for an army officer," stated pompous Major Clark, who by virtue of rank was officer in charge of flying, although he never flew without a second-lieutenant chauffeur. He did not approve of Groody.

"He comes nearest to doing, saying and being just what he wants to of any mortal I ever met," opined the C. O., pleasantly genial and expansive as a result of three cocktails. "Being one of our leading aces and unquestionably our best flyer has saved him many times from strict compliance——"

A peremptory knock at the door interrupted him. When the maid opened it Groody's lath-like figure, crowned by the tilted cap, was limned against the darkness.

He removed the cigar from his mouth and entered with deliberation.

"Greetings," he said, handing his cap to the maid.

"Miss Clare, may I present Mr. Groody?" said Mrs. Mills.

Miss Clare acknowledged the introduction with condescension. Groody looked down at her and bowed. That wide-sweeping wrinkle on one side of his mouth was deeper than usual, which increased the trace of mockery always discernible in his face.

"How do you do, Miss Clare," he said, and turned to receive his cocktail.

He drank it quickly and succeeded in stealing another one while listening to the barrage of conversation. Miss Clare's words were studded thickly with extracts from the French, not always pronounced with entire correctness. Groody watched her cynically, and listened with enjoyment.

"Pretty soon she'll remember there's no camera here," he opined to himself.

When the little party started for the club the powerful *aguadiente* had changed Groody's resentment at the whole affair into tolerance; a perverse pair of imps began to dance in the slate-colored eyes as he gravely inserted properly awed questions wherewith to keep Miss Clare's tinkling flow of technical conversation moving uninterruptedly. Her company was in San Antonio for a special picture, and it appeared that living conditions at the leading hotel, the climate, and various other matters were utterly unmentionable in their crudeness.

"Well, I suppose all great artists must make personal sacrifices for the sake of their work," said Groody with solemn worshipfulness. They were walking across the intervening lawn to the brightly-lighted club.

Miss Clare happened to look up, and even to her limited intellect there seemed to be something in her escort's mocking face which was vaguely disquieting. Could it be possible that this yokel was not impressed?

She forgot Groody, however, in the pleasurable sensation created by their entry into the thronged dining-room. Groody seated her with impeccable correctness, and was perhaps the only one of the party who did not feel the semblance of a thrill at the open interest of the other diners.

Miss Clare, with the enlarged audience, was on her mettle. She talked incessantly, turning her head this way and that so that the dining-room could get the full benefit of her artificial beauty and fixedly-bright smile. Her "a's" became longer, and only slightly-mispronounced phrases selected mostly from the French dripped from her tongue with increasing frequency, lending a certain refined elegance to her conversation. Her striking beauty was the beauty of the diamond, without the slightest leavening of warmth or charm.

She reminded Groody of a girl he had met in Buenos Aires. It seemed as though everything turned his mind to bygone days this evening. However, it was not so bad. He was getting a lot of laughs from Miss Clare. Being irreverent and hard to impress by nature, and totally unaffected by her stunning artificiality, there was nothing to detract from his sardonic amusement as he watched her play her part.

His face held an unwonted trace of boyishness as time went on, and there came a peculiar gleam in his eye. He surveyed the carefully correct party leisurely. With but few exceptions, they seemed slightly self-conscious. His eyes returned to the movie-star just in time to catch what he was sure was a quick look around to make sure that she had chosen the right fork.

The whole affair was stilted and unnatural, Groody decided, Most of the men said little, and the leading conversationalists among their better halves, during the brief lulls in their partner's chatter, were somewhat out of their element in discussing Miss Clare's pet topics, which concerned the world at large exclusively in its relationship to Polly Clare.

"One does not become a star without terrific effawt," she was saying to Mrs. Adams, a good-looking young matron whose family had owned large sections of Texas for three generations.

"And then one becomes inaccessible to earthbound mortals," said Major Clarke with carefully thought-out gallantry.

"*Touché!*" retorted the inaccessible star brightly.

Groody's thin lips twitched slightly. He wondered how long she had been waiting for a slight excuse to use *touche*.

"One thing I have always admired about your pictures, Miss Clare, is a certain touch of—er—what shall I say? *Ee-clat*, perhaps," he said without a trace of expression on his face.

There was an instant of frozen silence. Then Colonel Mills choked slightly. His face reddened. Others of the men, and some of the women, coughed suddenly, and excused themselves a trifle breathlessly while they bent flushed faces over their plates.

Miss Clare smiled superciliously at the bald error in pronunciation. Major Clarke appeared to be the only other person at the table who seemed shocked. Everybody began to talk hurriedly, although not quite cleverly enough to account for the epidemic of chuckles and giggles which overtook a majority of the guests.

Groody continued to conduct himself with irreproachable aplomb, meeting the dancing eyes of young Captain Adams and his wife without the slightest reflection of mirth in his own.

Gradually the table-talk became less hurried as a majority of the guests regained their mental equilibrium. Miss Clare surveyed the dining-room patronizingly, in the interval before desert was served.

"For so small and inexpensive a clubhouse I think this does very well," she remarked to Colonel Mills. "Chinese waiters are so unusual, too. And those simple curtains are very apropos."

Groody once again erupted into speech, his eyes on a perfect smoke-ring which he had wafted ceilingward.

"Yes indeed," he said. "A club, on an army post, adds a great deal to the *eesprit dee corpse*."

Just which guest it was who first gave vent to that strangled chuckle which started the table into irrepressible giggles and chortles has not been determined, although three different wives later accused their husbands of the crime. In any event, for a full moment during which Miss Polly Clare's beautiful mask of a face remained set in a determinedly bright smile the rest of the table struggled terrifically to save themselves from social damnation. The women were first to gain control over their faces, which speedily became set in varying degrees of shocked and horrified disapproval of Groody and all his works.

Miss Clare turned to Groody and almost purred in her rage.

"Were you ever really in France, or are you a humorist, Mr. Groody?" she inquired.

"Yes, and no, Miss Clare," responded the grave Groody.

It was indeed fortunate that the dinner had about run its course, for the guest-of-honor became unaccountably silent. Not an echo of the continent disturbed the smooth current of conversation which the army matrons set in motion. Assistance from their husbands was somewhat hampered by frequent lapses into hilarity not to be explained by the commonplace and utterly meaningless chatter with which all disguised their embarrassment. It was noticeable that these sporadic chuckles usually occurred when the perpetrators met the eye of the solemn Groody.

Through the performance at the theatre in San Antonio and the dancing which followed at a hotel Groody's temporary stimulation disappeared bit by bit. The leaven of boyishness which had softened the hard lines in his face was absent. Toward the close of the evening he was almost as much of a wet blanket as the furious moving picture star, for once again his thoughts were far away.

He succeeded in escaping the rest of the party, after well-acted adieux had been said to Miss Clare, and made the trip back to the field alone. He did not waste a moment thinking of his sacrilegious verbal bombshells at dinner. He was wondering whether Tom Service, roamer over the earth, was still in San Francisco. A month seemed almost too long for Tom to stay there, unless unusually interesting things had appeared on the horizon. It was worth a wire, anyhow.

THE devilish clamor of the alarm-clock awoke him from dream-filled sleep at six-thirty the next morning. He had forgotten to place it near the bed, so he silenced with a well-aimed boot which accomplished its mission so thoroughly that the battered timepiece expired forever.

Outside the cool, gray morning mist was shot with sunlight, and the deep base drone of fifty warming motors announced that the mechanics had started preparations for the day's grind.

"Will they ever stop training cadets?" breathed Groody prayerfully as he started the cold water running in the tub.

He bathed with expedition, and dressed with corresponding slowness. In shirt, breeches and laced field-boots he looked taller and thinner, and his face had a more saturnine caste with the big Stetson cocked carelessly on one side of his head. With helmet and goggles in hand he made his yawning way to the club for breakfast.

Other similarly clad young men, whose mental and physical condition varied from blitheness to apparent melancholia, depending on the previous evening's activities, were converging toward the same goal.

Groody took his accustomed small table, where Bob Forsythe, showing the effects of a large evening, was already devouring bacon and eggs.

"How you feel this morning, eh?" grinned the Chinese waiter, whose life at mealtime was spent in a constant effort to find out whether Groody's remarks were serious or facetious.

"I only feel about seventy this morning," returned the flyer. "I might feel eighty. Poached eggs, bacon, muffins and coffee. And grapefruit. If a single slit of the rind gets into my mouth, I'm going to rasp your left ear with a ten-inch file."

Lee grinned hilariously, and slid off.

"Nice evening with the queen of the movies?" inquired Forsythe.

"——," returned Groody without particular interest.

Forsythe grinned. Food was commencing to overcome that unnecessary feeling.

"I heard a rumor or two about the party——"

Groody's austere face lightened amazingly as his mouth widened.

"I guess the actorine didn't have a very good time," he remarked.

"Before the day's out I'll get the truth of it," Forsythe warned him as he prepared to depart. "I'd get everything *but* that from you."

Groody assaulted his grapefruit absently. The day's prospect was far from interesting. The discontent which had reached its climax the day before seethed without abatement in his bosom.

Breakfast finished, he strolled down to hangar 24, where abode, in working hours, the aristocracy of the field, aerially speaking. Hangar 24 was the final check stage, where cadets who had passed through dual control, solo, cross-country, acrobatics and formation came to be finally passed on before receiving the rank which made them air-plane pilots. Tanned young men who were veterans of the air lounged on the bench, awaiting the day's consignment of candidates.

"Hi, George," Rankin, the stage commander, greeted him. "Got a good job for you today."

Groody removed the cigar from his mouth and gazed at the wiry little Captain wordlessly. He knew what Rankin's "good jobs" were.

"Three cadets been turned in on the acrobatic stage for discharge. Sims says they're no good. Take 'em up and look 'em over. If you say so, the boss 'll fire 'em."

"Thanks, Ray. Some day when you get a real plum, like testing a papier mâché ship or finding out whether a Jenny will plow through a hangar, why, don't forget me."

Homely little Rankin grinned amiably, and started for the tower which was stage headquarters, located on top of the hangar. Groody stalked over to the bench and joined the lounging instructors, who were idly discussing various matters while waiting for their cadets.

All the other stages had started operations. Dual-control ships droned round and round the field, periodically swooping down over the hangars for a landing. Once in a while the helmeted figure in the front seat could be seen to throw up his hands, signaling that the ship was in full control of the green youngster in the back. The planes bounced and skidded and slipped in breathtaking fashion, but the stoical instructors waited calmly for the last moment before a crack-up to take control of the planes and with equal stolidity signaled their cadets to go around and try it again.

Up and down the line in front of the hangars reserve-ships were being warmed up, others prepared for test, still others for cross-country missions to the border. Above Field One, a mile away, acrobatic planes over their assigned sectors looped and rolled and spun. Every so often, when a cadet had the stick, a ship would hover on its back on top of a loop, fall off, and flutter downward five hundred feet like a leaf before the instructor brought it back to its wonted position.

Groody, his saturnine countenance resting in cupped hands, was apparently gazing at the fringe of mesquite far across the field, but his eyes did not take in a single feature of the familiar scene. He was feeling the sting of flying spume on his lips—toiling through the jungle in deadening heat—bending to back-breaking toil on some far, evil-smelling wharf—watching the circling promenade of beshawled señoritas in dimly lighted plazas. Temporary affluence, frequent hardship, but on the road!

Rankin's call pierced his mental barriers.

"All right, Groody!"

Groody arose wearily and turned to face three nervous cadets. One of them was very short and fat, and another one possessed a melancholy countenance which seemed in harmony with his thin, narrow-shouldered body. The third man was the owner of a crisp little mustache, a dignified carriage and impeccable clothing.

'You first," said Groody to the youngster with the mustache.

The cadet saluted with exaggerated snappiness, gave the fat one his white-banded hat, and followed Groody to the ship, adjusting his helmet and goggles as he went.

The flyer looked like an aggressive bird-of-prey with the tight-fitting leather helmet rimming his hawk-like face. He folded up his long legs to an extent sufficiently to let him ease into the front cockpit, and turned on the gas.

"Off!" he yelled, and the waiting mechanics whirled the propeller to suck gas into the cylinders.

"Contact!"

"Contact!" repeated Groody, and snapped on the switch.

He jazzed the throttle as the mechanics, one holding the other's wrist to jerk him out of the way, swung the big stick through. It caught on the first try, and the eight-cylinder training-motor purred along evenly. The ship had been warmed, so he wasted no time in inching the throttle forward. The whir of the motor grew into a fast-drumming drone and finally into a roar.

The oil pressure jumped to forty and the thermometer crept up to 75 Centigrade. Groody tried the controls, cut the motor to idling, and turned to his cadet.

"Ready?" he inquired.

The cadet, his mouth strained below the big goggles, nodded. Groody pointed back toward the field, and settled in his seat.

His student, with the aid of the mechanics, turned around and took off. The nose dipped perilously as he got the stick too far ahead, but Groody made no move. His eyes roved constantly watching for other near-by ships. The ground dropped away beneath them, and in a sloppy bank the cadet turned to circle the field.

The airman sat motionless, save for signaling hands, while he put the man behind him through his paces. Not a move did he make when the ship went into a loop with too little speed, hung on its back, and fell in a tumbling rush toward the flat brown earth below. He let the cadet fight it as it fell a thousand feet in a giddy whirl. It finally came right-side up. A glance backward showed the youngster's face white as marble.

After twenty minutes of assorted flying they came down. The ship darted for the ground from two hundred feet at an angle so steep that it was an ungodly task for even Groody to keep his hands from the controls, but he only clamped his teeth tighter into his unlighted cigar. By a seeming miracle they leveled out in time, landed without getting the tail down, bounced and stalled ten feet above the ground, fell again and bounced, and finally came to rest.

Groody did not say a word as he took charge of the ship and taxied in to the line. He turned around again, and signaled the little fat fellow to come out. Twenty minutes, somewhat similar to the last trip, and then the sad-looking candidate, who surpassed the others in his ability to do everything wrong.

They would not do, and Groody knew it. They were minus that natural judgment of speed, distance and the feel of the ship which a flyer must have. As he ambled slowly from his ship toward the three waiting students, who were watching him with their hearts in their eyes, he thought back to his own cadet days, when the whole world revolved around the effort to successfully navigate the numberless pitfalls which a would-be flyer runs into.

He lighted his cigar deliberately, and looked down at his recent passengers.

"You're rotten," he stated without heat. "You're terrible. I won't turn you in to be discharged—" the faces before him mirrored sudden ecstasy—"but I'm telling you to quit and quit now. You'll kill yourselves if you keep on. As flyers, you're —— good at the manual of arms. Take my advice, and tell me to turn you in while your necks aren't cracked. So far as flying goes, you don't know anything. You may be experts at arithmetic or puzzles, but in the air you're dumb."

Few people, least of all those cadets, would have suspected that beneath the harsh tones and hard, mocking face there lurked the tender-heartedness which he cursed as weakness, and which prevented him from blasting the hopes of the youngsters before him by doing his official duty.

The dapper one with the mustache, perhaps as a result of renewed confidence of Groody's decision to let them be their own arbiters, drew himself up pompously.

"Sir, I—I am not willing to admit that I'm dumb. I——"

"Shut up!" roared Groody fiercely, chewing his cigar until its tip bobbed up and down. "When I say you're dumb, you're dumb! You're dumber than the average. Why, you're so dumb you think flying speed is the name of a book. When you tried to make a landing you bounced so high and so long I thought they'd have to shoot us to keep us from starving to death. Well, do you three want to commit suicide, or have you got a trace of sense? You can't have much, or you'd never have got the flying bug anyhow."

After this tirade the cadets looked at each other covertly. The mustached youth, much crest-fallen, was the first to meet Groody's eyes.

"I want to stick," he said.

"So do I," chorused the others.

Groody grunted in abysmal disgust.

"All right, beat it," he commanded.

He lounged toward the stage and yelled up to the clerk.

"Those three may get by without killing themselves—put my O.K. on their record cards," he ordered. "Anything more doing Ray?"

"Not a thing," returned the stage commander.

Groody rescued his hat, perched it on his head, and strode aimlessly up the line like some long-legged, slow-moving crane. The ceaseless drone which undertoned existence at Donovan Field during daylight hours beat on ears so accustomed to it that it was not a part of his consciousness. The sun-drenched field was beginning to send flickering heat-waves dancing through the air, and at intervals swirling dust-clouds billowed skyward behind the propellers of warming ships.

Groody returned the greetings flung at him from sun-burned young men along the line with dry brevity. He was totally unconscious of the interest of cadets who never forgot that he had twelve Huns to his credit and was the flying monarch of the field.

He stopped opposite a big De Haviland bomber, its sixty feet of wing-spread looking scarcely large enough for the massive twelve cylinder Liberty motor bulking in front. A sudden notion to fly took possession of the air-man. It was something to do. It would provide a way to work off some of the restlessness which cried for relief.

"How about a ride in the D. H.," he inquired of Maxwell, a stocky test-pilot with a square, much-scarred face.

"All right with me, but I haven't anything to say about it. Covington isn't here. The bus is all right—I just tested her."

"Warm 'er up," commanded Groody, and the mechanics lounging in the shade of the wide-spreading wings leaped to obey with unaccustomed alacrity.

Groody crossed the road to his quarters and buckled on a belt which held two Colts. He was an excellent shot, and of late had been practising shooting at targets on the ground from a side-slipping ship. It takes a good man to slip a ship downward with so little forward speed that anything like accurate shooting is possible.

When he got back to the line the motor was idling on the preliminary warm-up.

"If Covington kicks when he gets back, tell him to go out and bay at the moon," Groody remarked with a grin. He knew the fiery chief test-pilot, and what he might say.

"Good," returned Maxwell, who, being very familiar with both Groody and Covington, made a mental note to be present at the verbal encounter which would ensue when Groody came down from his unauthorized trip.

The flyer threw his battered Stetson on the ground, put on his helmet, and then waved the mechanic out of the cockpit. When he had ensconced himself therein he surveyed the maze of instruments before him with a practised eye. Temperature, oil-pressure, voltmeter, air-pressure, motor shutter adjustment, gas petcocks, horizontal-stablizer—he read the meaning of every needle and lever and wheel as effortlessly as though they were words on a sheet of paper.

Mechanics stationed themselves at wing-tips and on the tail, and Groody advanced the spark all the way, following it with the throttle. Seventeen hundred revolutions a minute showed on the tachometer, with the air-pressure at three, the voltmeter charging, and oil and temperature satisfactory. Neither switch in the double-ignition system showed a miss—the great motor roared with a power that made the great ship quiver like a thing alive and strain against the wheel-blocks to be gone.

He cut it to idling and nodded at the mechanics. They pulled the wheel-blocks and helped him turn. This done, he turned the Liberty full on and pushed forward on the stick. In calm disregard of the little sign on the instrument board which read "Do not fly without a passenger or a hundred and fifty pounds in the rear seat," the bomber sped over the ground and took the air.

As the bumping ceased Groody obeyed a sudden impulse and pushed slightly forward on the stick. The tremendously powerful ship hurtled over the ground, less than a foot above it, at a hundred and thirty miles an hour. He eased it up to an altitude of eight feet, and then threw it into a steep bank. With right wing-tip almost scraping the ground, the big ship swept around. The slightest flaw in handling of rudder or stick meant a bad crackup—there was less than a foot between Groody and probable death. He straightened out with the ship driving for the hangars, and then in a left-hand bank curved around once more.

Awe-struck cadets and mechanics and grinning instructors watched that ton-and-a-half ship play around over the field like some monster dragon-fly. Smooth, graceful, roaring like some Gargantuan behemoth, its wing-tips flirted with the grass-tips, and the pilot gambled with swift destruction. But it was flying that was as perfect as only experience plus genius can attain.

Finally Groody, having chased most of

the other ships to the line and completely stopped flying activities for the moment on Donovan Field, gave up his dizzy banking and pointed the powerful plane southward. It gained altitude rapidly, and over the far edge of the big air-drome was fifteen hundred feet high.

Ahead, in those misty distances beyond the billowing mesquite which blanketed the receding earth, lay the border. Suddenly Groody desired to visit the Laredo flight, and have a drink with Goodhue—*tequila* or *aguadiente* or perhaps *mescal* and benedictine, which is a severe beverage.

To think was to act. He throttled the motor to fifteen hundred revolutions, took a look at the instruments, glanced at the compass, adjusted his cigar in the other corner of his mouth, and settled down for the hour-and-a-half's grind which, bar accident, would be sufficient for the hundred-and-fifty-mile trip. Donovan Field, its regulations and wrathful superiors, if he thought of them at all—and that was doubtful—bothered him not.

Groody craved action.

EARLY that same morning, while the ground-mist still shrouded the earth and filtered the light of the sun, a man and a girl cantered through the outskirts of the town of Falfuria, which is forty miles north of the Rio Grande. The air was still briskly cool, and as the pair urged their wiry cow-ponies into a gallop the rush of it whipped the warm blood into their cheeks.

In a few moments they had left the cleared fields behind, and pulled their horses down to a walk along the dim trail through the mesquite.

"Well, 'twill only be a day or two at most before Mandera gets here and we can be gone," remarked the man.

There was just a touch of brogue in his speech, in keeping with the blue of his puckered eyes and the short, slightly uptilted nose. Gray hair, closely-cropped, showed below the old army Stetson which he wore. His short, bulky body seemed accustomed to the saddle, for he rode with the effortless ease of a man who had spent a great deal of his time on a horse.

The girl laughed gaily.

"I don't care if he never gets here," she said. "I love it, daddy."

The old man's eyes twinkled.

"There are few things you don't love, Dorry," he chuckled. "But 'twill be nice to see you in the French gowns, knocking the earls and dukes loose."

She looked down at her leather divided skirt, flannel blouse, and miniature cowboy boots, and her laugh rang out again.

"And you in a dinner coat! It seems funny to think of you as Mr. Joy instead of major, daddy. I shall never get accustomed to it. We can't be any happier when we get all that money, anyhow!"

She was tall and slender, and rode as easily as her corpulent father. A rakishly tilted sombrero crowned a face which was alight with health and happiness. Scattered freckles, clear gray eyes with distracting black lashes and eyebrows, and a short nose which went her father's one better in its saucy tilt made her a rather delectable vision for the most critical eye, and ex-Major Joy did not possess a critical eye where she was concerned.

He gazed at his sparkling daughter with huge contentment. During her years in the East they had never failed to spend her vacations together, and some of them had been in far stranger places than the deserted wilderness where they now were. Close inspection might have revealed signs of many out-door Summers in the slim, delicately-tanned hands that held the reins so masterfully, and the easy grace with which she rode and handled her fractious pony.

"We have never lacked for enjoyment, but then 'twill be nice to be plutocrats," resumed the old man. "Mandera and I can locate the mines exactly, and in a week's time be out of Mexico again and get things started through the State Department. I told you that Shields and Banner up in Utica have agreed to supply the capital? We're all set, Dorry."

Doreen nodded, tucking up a strand of red-gold hair beneath her hat.

"Mr. Mandera is a real good mining engineer, is he?" she asked lightly.

"The very best. He's no Mex—he's a real Castilian and a white man. If he hadn't gone down with Huerta he'd be one of the biggest and wealthiest men in Mexico. You'll like him. When old Barillo—God rest his soul—willed me the mines he told me to get Mandera, which of course I would have done anyhow."

The muffled hoof-beats of several galloping horses reached their ears simultaneously.

As they turned in their saddles four men in single file appeared through the chaparral, following the trail.

The leader, a short, bow-legged man with a seamed and wrinkled face shadowed by a huge, stained sombrero, pulled up behind the Joys. Three Mexicans, whose faces showed varying degrees of untrustworthiness, slowed up behind the party.

"I'm aimin' to find 'Padre' Joy," said the leader, removing his sombrero and wiping his mahogany forehead with a sleeve of his blue-flannel shirt.

The familiar army nickname, coming from the Texan's lips, surprized Joy. Officially Major Joy had been a chaplain; during the Mexican expedition under Pershing, and the war in Europe, and at various other odd times, he was of the Intelligence. And all through the army he was known as Padre Joy.

The Texan's eyes took in the army breeches and O. D. shirt of the portly horseman, and his leathery face wrinkled more deeply in a satisfied grin.

"I reckon you're my hombre," he stated, replacing his sombrero.

Joy's mind was working busily, striving to plumb the possible reasons for the sudden visitation of the drawling American and his three more or less villainous henchmen.

"Well, what's the lay?" he inquired finally.

The three Mexicans had quietly guided their mounts to either side, until the Joys were hemmed in a loose circle.

"I'm here to invite yuh to accompany us to the border and into Mexico to see a feller yuh may have heard of—José Barillo. I sure am plumb glad to meet you with yuh, Padre. I heard a lot about yuh."

Joy did not betray the sudden sinking of heart which the softly slurred words of the horseman brought him. His castles in the air tumbled around him. He did not trust himself to look at the quiet Doreen, who had been listening and watching with eager interest.

"I guess maybe I'm entitled to know a few details," said the Padre slowly. "Is this an invitation, or an—abduction?"

The representative of José Barillo adjusted one of the guns which sagged in their holsters, and threw one short, booted leg over the saddle. He settled himself comfortably, and thoughtfully rolled a cigaret.

"A few minutes won't do no harm, I reckon," he drawled. "When Huerta went under, you helped old man Barillo out o' Mexico, him bein' a Huerta man and looked for considerable by the opposition. Am I right?"

Joy saw that there was no possible reason to resort to subterfuge. He nodded.

"Barillo, poor as a church-mouse all of a sudden with all his known property vamoosed, died in El Paso soon after, with you takin' care of him, religiously and secularly; food and medicine and that truck, I mean."

Again Joy nodded, his suddenly cold gray eyes never wavering from the middle-aged, neutral-looking border man before him.

"In gratitude and soft-heartedness, Barillo, just before he died, made yuh an adopted son o' his and told yuh the location o' some platinum mines he and this here Mandera, the minin'-engineer which had been workin' for him, had found and was waitin' to work until Mexico settled down refined-like and quit tryin' to stick pins in old Huerta's Presidential chair."

"How do you know all this?"

"From young José Barillo. How he knows so much, I dunno. Mebbe the old man left papers or somethin'. Anyhow, you're aimin' now to go into Mexico with Mandera, git the exact dimensions, specifications and locations o' these said mines, and then file on 'em through the authorities here in the States and git all set before anybody else but you know there is any mines."

Joy, veteran of a thousand strange adventures, nevertheless was completely nonplused. Starting from some crum of information, young Barillo, the old capitalist's renegade son, had evidently been able to find out practically everything he needed to know about his and Mandera's plans. He had been absolutely certain that Mandera and himself, now that Barillo senior was dead, were the only ones in the world who knew of the amazingly rich platinum mines which Mandera had discovered for his employer.

For a moment there was complete silence. The buzzing of insects and the swish of horses' tails were the only things which disturbed the quiet of the sunlit forest of mesquite.

"Anyhow," resumed the tranquil Texan, "Barillo—young José—feelin' that his daddy done him dirt in not leavin' him nothin'——"

"Why should he?" demanded Joy. "José practically betrayed his father; to a life of useless dissipation he added cowardice and disloyalty. He proved himself a yellow, treacherous——"

"That's as may be," drawled the other, expelling a cloud of fragrant smoke with untroubled calm. "But findin' out that you and Mandera was meetin' here at the Colwell ranch, Barillo sent us to git yuh, so's yuh could show José where the mines are. He knows yuh know where they are, but ain't got exact specifications enough yet t' know just how much land yuh want t' take 'em all in, et cetery. José knows there's mines, but he don't know where. On account o' turnin' against Huerta, like you say, he's in kind o' strong with the Gover'ment, and he aims to git his hooks in them mines.

"Likewise, knowin' you and knowin' the present state of affairs along the border, he ain't fixin' to be no hog. To satisfy yuh, you're to git quite considerable of a share in 'em. Some Gover'ment men gits a slice, an' José gits the biggest one. Mandera is out altogether. José figures to git away with this here kidnapin'—" the speaker grinned fleetingly—"because yuh'd be a fool not t' be satisfied with his offer and take what he gives yuh and say nothin' about any triflin' illegalities."

"What if I won't tell him what I know about where the mines are?"

The Southerner's tranquil, sun-puckered eyes rested on the Padre with a slight twinkle in their depths.

"It ain't never a good thing to mess with a rattlesnake in his own hole," he opined gently. "Well, we got t' git goin'. Your darter here complicates things, but yuh can rest assured she'll be treated with the best o' consideration. Inasmuch as yuh might make a break for freedom, an' it would do no good whatsoever to us to have t' shoot yuh, yuh'll excuse us if we tie yuh on your horses, comfortablelike, and fix it so's yuh can't slip us."

Doreen's eyes were flashing with excitement. It did not seem possible that a month before she had been receiving a diploma in the cloistered halls of an eastern college, dancing with young men, in dinner coats, attending the theater—and here were bandits, lost mines, an abduction across the border! She was conscious of no fear whatever, and the wealth which her father had in prospect had never seemed very real, anyhow. She glanced at his round brown face and brooding eyes.

"Never mind, daddy!" she said impulsively. "We didn't need their darn mines, anyhow!"

The Texan, who had dismounted, glanced up with a grin.

"Some gal yuh got, Padre," he commented with unoffensive frankness.

Rope in hand, he came close to the silent Joy.

"O' course I ain't playin' no hero's part from yore point of view in this deal," he said in low tones as he busied himself tying Joy's feet together under the horse's belly, "But don't git scared o' these Spigs. I can handle 'em. I'm sorry the gal's along, but she's as safe as though she was settin' in the lobby o' the St. Anthony up to San Antone—and a lot safer."

His mouth widened as he looked upward.

"Yuh can git yore teeth into what a Spig's up to," he remarked with a chuckle. "Now that hotel-lobby herd is different."

He straightened, having finished the task. Joy's feet were still in the stirrups, but connected by the rope so that he could not dismount. The leader of the outlaws passed his over-sized, gnarled hands over the Padre rapidly, but found no weapon.

"Sorry, miss, but I'll have t' do likewise," he stated, and swiftly knotted a length of rope around the girl's booted ankles.

He remounted, lit another cigaret, and glanced at a big nickle-cased watch.

"Let's mosey," he said.

One of the vaqueros led, with the Joys following, the leader behind them, and the other two Mexicans bringing up the rear. In single file they cantered southwest through the spreading mesquite. By taking this course they would circle Falfuria, and could strike southward for the Rio Grande without much risk of running into troublesome strangers who might seek to know the reason for two bound captives.

The cavalcade plodded steadily along in the increasing heat. The sun beat down from a cloudless sky, and not a breath of air relieved the baking earth. Occasional horned toads and a snake or two—rattlers—seemed the only denizens of the wild which cared to brave the heat. At first casual remarks by the leader of the band, and some slight conversational efforts by Padre Joy and Doreen broke the silence, but as the sun climbed higher the party became wordless.

Joy was buried in his thoughts, which were concerned with some possible means of working his way out of the predicament in which he had so suddenly found himself. With natural optimism, plus the devil-may-careness of the person who has seen many ups and downs, he avoided slumping into despondency. Doreen bore up nobly under the strain of the ride, but seemed to be satisfied to devote her whole attention to making the trip as easily as possible.

It was an hour before noon when the party halted for lunch and a rest. The leader untied his captives, let them settle themselves comfortably in the scant shade of a mesquite tree, and then retied their ankles. The Mexicans gathered greasewood, and built a fire in the small clearing.

The coffee, made with water from their canteens, was on the fire when a far-away drone reached their ears. The Texan glanced up at the blinding sky, now speckled with cumulus clouds which would later become vast, stately mounds of snowy mist.

"Airyplane, but I can't see it yet," he drawled equably. "Must be one o' them army border-patrolers. Shore seems funny to have airyplanes patrolin' this country, don't it? Believe me, they shore got a beat. They cover it from Brownsville to San Diego twice a day."

The low-pitched drum of the motor grew louder as the plane neared them. Doreen's eyes searched the sky eagerly.

"Dunno what they're doin' this far north o' the river," remarked the Texan, who was stretched comfortably on the ground in a patch of shade.

"Maybe some one flying from Donovan Field in San Antonio," suggested Joy.

The hum, as of some giant bee, grew into a roar. The plane was still invisible, however. The Mexicans stopped jabbering and looked upward half-fearfully, although they must have been accustomed to the aerial patrol.

"There it is!" exclaimed Doreen, her eyes shining. The big ship was not over five hundred feet high, and its course appeared to be due south. It shot along at terrifying speed, a quarter of a mile westward.

"Shore travelin'," observed the outlaw. "Mighty low, though."

Suddenly the plane banked, and came hurtling toward them.

"——," remarked their chief captor without particular heat. "He's seen us and is figurin' to give us a treat."

The soft voice grew cold, and suddenly the eyes which bored into Joy's held a metallic glint.

"Don't move," he said quietly. "I'll do the wavin'. Miss Joy, stand up, please, and wave yore handkerchief and act natural."

The Padre could not understand this care on the part of the border-man, but then the Padre did not know the habits of the border-patrol.

The great ship, coming lower, swept over their heads with deafening noise and blinding speed. But one helmeted and goggled head, looking as though it might belong to some gnome of the upper air, peered over the side. They could hear the plane getting farther away, and then the roar increased again. With the wheels of the under-carriage only a few feet above the trees the ship passed over them for the second time, the ground shaking to the rhythm of twelve mighty cylinders firing in tune. Still so low that it was out of sight almost instantly, it sped southward and gradually silence mantled the earth once more.

The Mexicans, drawing various cans from their saddle-bags, resumed preparations for lunch. Their leader dropped to the sand and stretched out comfortably.

"Might just as well stay here through the heat, I reckon. That'll give Cal a chance to ketch up with us, if that's what he's aimin' to do."

"Who's Cal?" enquired Joy.

"José's right hand man, so to speak," returned the other. "I didn't mention him, did I? He had some trouble with his hawse, and we went ahead, not wantin' to waste no time gettin' yuh. Cal may break for Nuevo Laredo, or he may track us—he knows our route. I guess there ain't no chance o' the Colwell's sendin' out any rescue party till sundown."

Joy was compelled to agree with him. Old Bert Colwell would figure they had stopped at some other house for lunch, and there would be no notice taken of their absence before evening. They had been in the habit of taking long rides ever since their arrival.

In fact, it seemed that young Barillo's plans were going to be highly effective, simple and straightforward as they were. There might be a chance that by means of divulging some information which he had in his possession regarding certain activities of the young Mexican he might succeed in spoiling that polished traitor's stand-in with the present government, but that was in the future. Meanwhile, decided the Padre, patience would be the most important of virtues.

IT WAS pure accident that Groody had been flying as high as five hundred feet, thus gaining a glimpse of the cavalcade below him. Inasmuch as solid chaparral presents no landing possibilities whatever, it was just as safe and a lot more interesting to stay low, where he had to fight bumps and keep a sharp lookout continually, so he had been flying for a half-hour with his under-carriage only a few feet from the earth.

Just before sighting the party, however, scattered clearings showed ahead, so he had started to climb in order to take advantage of them in the event of a missing motor. His roving eyes picked up the group below, and the natural habit of an old border-patrolman bade him take a look. He would have swooped over, anyhow—in his present state of mind he was incapable of overlooking anything which might present the smallest of opportunities for possible excitement.

As he sped across the little clearing for the second time his casual gaze became fixed for an instant. Did he see rope between the ankles of the man in khaki, and the girl? It was an unusual outfit, anyhow—Mexicans, and a girl, and apparently two Americans.

In an instant his mind was made up. There was just a dim chance that something might be wrong. If not, it would be something to do, and the prospect of a couple of hours lazy conversation with Rangers or cowmen or whoever the people in the party might be held some possibilities of interest. If that clearing he had spotted was only as good a landing-field as it looked to be from a distance, he would stop off.

Inasmuch as border-patrol ships have been known to come home with bullet-holes in the wings, and at least one border-flier has been the target for a lucky shot from the ground, Groody played safe.

He flew southward, along the course he had been flying when he had sighted the party. He was as low as he could get, so that the ship would be out of sight of the people on the ground before it got a mile away. Five minutes of flying, and he decided that there would be no chance of his prospective hosts hearing the roar of the motor. He throttled it to 1350 rotations a minute, as low as he dared, to make assurance doubly sure.

This done, he circled toward the clearing he had noticed west of his course. In two minutes he was over it. It was at least five hundred yards long, and apparently less than fifty yards wide. It was a two-way field, lying east and west, but below him the mesquite showed no signs of riffling in a breeze, so he need not figure on any wind to complicate the landing.

The field looked level as the De Haviland roared around it, and the flyer's searching eyes could discern no washes or stumps to interfere with his landing. It might be soft, but a stall landing would take care of that.

Three hundred yards west of it his ship was pointed directly for it. He throttled slowly, his out-thrust head fighting the propeller blast as his eyes watched the fringe of mesquite. The air speed meter needle dropped from a hundred to ninety miles an hour, then to seventy-five. Groody kept the nose of the ship well-up, with the motor half open. As he reached the edge of the field he cut the throttle entirely, his landing-gear barely escaping the treetops as the speed dropped to seventy-two miles an hour. A brief burst of motor to keep the nose up an instant more, and he jerked back on the stick. The big bomber dropped on three points. The drag of the tail-skid plus wind-resistance on the wings stopped him a hundred yards down the field, which seemed to be hard underneath with a slightly soft upper dressing. It was a good field.

He turned off the gas and let the motor run out, clicking off the switches when the propeller died. He would have to depend on the help of one of the men to start it again, but a little detail like that did not bother him. If they were all right, they would be glad to do it—if not, he would make them do it.

The field was due southwest of the group's camping-place. He started on his five-mile walk without delay, sighting carefully to keep himself from deviating into a circle. When he got close to his objective, he depended on the smoke of the fire to guide him.

In a little less than an hour his long strides brought him close enough to see the lazily-curling smoke. Groody wiped his streaming face, and took brief counsel with himself. He decided to take no chances whatever.

He went forward with infinite care, the soft earth deadening his footsteps completely. He took advantage of every bit of cover. His efforts seemed to be successful, for careful observation from behind a clump of trees, when he had stolen close to the lunching-party, showed no indication that his presence was known. The chances were good that they were entirely ignorant of his landing.

Bit by bit he worked closer, circling until he was behind the three Mexicans. The girl and the two other men were talking while they munched their food, resting easily against the trunks of trees. He was a hundred yards from them when he made sure that the stout man in khaki, and the girl, both had their ankles bound loosely.

It took him ten minutes to crawl within twenty-five yards of them. He had to keep a close watch for tarantulas and snakes, and circling prickly cactus growths was another annoying necessity. Finally, however, he was ready to make his play.

With the two cocked Colts in his hands he arose and stepped from behind the gnarled trunk of the mesquite tree which had been his screen.

"Hands up, everybody!" he said crisply.

His narrowed eyes, glinting with unaccustomed fire, roved watchfully as he strode forward. For an instant the entire party seemed frozen into immobility. The Mexicans' distorted faces peered back at him in complete bewilderment which held more than a trace of fear. The little American with the two guns had been caught completely unawares in his reclining position. He was the only one who did not promptly obey the hard-faced air-man's command.

"Get 'em up!"

The little Texan's eyes probed the army man's for just an instant. Slowly his hands went up above his head, one of them still holding a sandwich. The fact that he obeyed and did not chance a draw was a tribute to Groody, if he had only known it.

"You Spigs get up slow and turn facing me. Keep your hands up. Good. Now, please give me the lay of the land. I'm simply taking no chances."

He looked thoroughly alert and competent with those two vicious automatics in his hands.

"My name is Joy—ex-major in the army, lieutenant. This band here captured me and my daughter——"

"Not Padre Joy?" queried Groody without taking his eyes from the four outlaws.

"Right you are."

"Then please search this gang and take any dangerous playthings away from 'em," requested Groody.

Joy, his full face one wide smile and his gray eyes dancing, proceeded to carry out Groody's bidding with thoroughness and expedition. He was enjoying himself as much as the breathless, starry-eyed Doreen, who was watching the procession of events with wordless amazement.

The Mexicans had three six-shooters and three knives among them, while their leader's artillery was all in sight.

"Now tie 'em up, if you please, and then I can smoke," said Groody. "I guess everybody in the army knows about you, Padre, but I never figured to meet you under such pleasant circumstances."

" 'Tis very diverting," chuckled Joy.

He and his daughter busied themselves with untying the complicated knots in their bonds, and it was ten minutes before they had them loosened. There was sufficient rope for the Padre to cut into shorter lengths and tie the four prisoners' wrists behind their backs. The little Texan's equilibirum was undisturbed, his leathery face remaining as inscrutable as always.

"Mind if I sample a little of the chow?" inquired Groody. "And you haven't introduced me to the young lady."

"My daughter," laughed the Padre. "Lieutenant——"

"Groody."

He liked Miss Joy. Her hand-clasp was firm and her behavior during the somewhat unusual events of the last few moments had aroused his admiration. Her out-of-doors costume became her. She looked and acted as though the baking wilderness and the bound outlaws were the most natural things in the world.

"We surely received help from heaven," she laughed as her frank gray eyes met the air-man's. "Have you ever acted the part of an angel before?"

"He seemed competent," observed her father as he brought Groody a thick sandwich and a tin cup full of steaming coffee.

"I've often been a fallen angel," grinned Groody.

It was surprizing how that grin of his softened the harshness of his face, and dissipated part of the effect of the lines around his mouth and the steely eyes.

While he ate Padre Joy sketched the story for him. Groody found little out-of-the-ordinary in it—he knew the ex-Major's history as the foremost secret-service man the army had had during the Mexican expedition and the war with Germany, and he was likewise familiar with the direct methods of the border.

Some of Joy's exploits, when he was wandering through Mexico and Austria under the protection of his priestly garb, were already surreptitiously famous. And others, if ever the time comes when they may be told, will make some transcriber's fortune. Master linguist, fearless adventurer, and withal no religious hypocrite, Padre Joy had been one of the three or four best-known men in the army, not excepting those with more than one star on their shoulders.

"Well, it's hot and all that, but I guess probably we'd better get in motion," said Groody at length. "How far from here is the Colwell ranch, Padre?"

"Well, I should say about a four-hour ride—northeast."

"You've already had a considerable jaunt," remarked Groody. "And it strikes me the young lady looks a little tired-out in her quiet moments."

There were little lines of weariness in Doreen's face. She laughed gaily, however, and disclaimed fatigue.

"Listen, Padre," said Groody at length. "I practically stole this ship from Donovan Field, and unless I get word to 'em or something pretty *pronto* there'll be the —— to pay. Why don't you and Miss Joy fly down to Laredo with me—it'll only take a half-hour or so—and then we can get the law moving so that these birds will get caught before they cross the border. They won't be but a few miles from here by the time we land, and then you can get your horses back. You can get word to the ranch from Laredo. It'll save you a long ride——"

"Let's do it, daddy!" Doreen burst forth eagerly. "It would be wonderful."

"A good end to a fine day," agreed the Padre with a chuckle.

"We'll take the little fellow here to help start the engine, and leave the Spigs tied. He can bring back the horses and then release his thugs. That'll lose 'em some time, besides. Shall we start?"

"The quicker the better," said Joy, getting to his feet. "Besides, there's another man in the gang. He may be trailing us and get in any minute. He got left behind somewhere on account of his horse getting loose or something, so the chief here told us. I don't want any more company that's working for Barillo—not until I get a chance to poison that young rattlesnake's pie for him!"

AN HOUR later the four riders reached the clearing where the big De Haviland lay shining in the broiling sunlight. They tied their horses at the edge, and then Groody explained to the Joys how they would ride. It was comparatively simple to carry two passengers in the back seat, providing they stood up. It was a tight fit, for the Padre was far from sylph-like, but Groody finally succeeded in getting them wedged in and the belt loosened sufficiently to reach around them both. It was a free-swinging observer's belt, constructed to allow the back-seat man every freedom of movement.

He faced his passengers backward so that their eyes would not have to stand the terrific wind-blast. He gave Miss Joy his helmet, but the goggles he would be compelled to use himself or else run the risk of an almost certain crack-up at the end of the trip. No eyes can stand the wind-blast of a De Haviland propeller except behind a wind-shield, and trying to land from behind a wind-shield is ticklish business.

This done, he climbed in the front cockpit, keeping a watchful eye on the bandit leader the while. He primed the motor, turned on the gas, pumped up the air-pressure and retarded both throttle and spark.

"Now, Padre, if you'll take this gun and watch our silent friend here while I spin the prop, we'll soon be ready to go," he said, handing the Colt to Joy. The Padre was in no shape to extract one of the captured guns from his belt.

Their prisoner smiled fleetingly.

"Ain't takin' many chances, are yuh?" he drawled.

"None whatever," Groody grinned back.

He spun the propeller a few times—the feat of a strong man, for the compression in a Liberty motor is a thing not lightly to be overcome—and then went back to the cockpit and snapped on the switches. He left the throttle retarded.

The little Texan, having already been instructed in his duties, set himself with one gnarled hand on the propeller. Groody grasped the other wrist with both his hands, and started the count. At one and two the pair swayed in unison. At the count "three!" Groody jerked with all his strength, and the propeller swung through. Due to the heat of the sun, which had kept the motor warm, it caught immediately and Groody got around to the cockpit in time to advance the throttle a trifle and keep the Liberty from dying. The thermometer showed sixty centigrade—high enough in an emergency, and time was precious. He decided not to bother with getting wheel-blocks so that the motor could be warmed extensively.

"All right—*adios*," he said to his captive, who immediately started for the edge of the clearing with the awkward, bow-legged walk of a rider.

Groody was wiping his goggles, standing with one foot on the little step cut in the side of the fuselage, when above the gentle idling of the motor he heard a shouted "Hands up!"

A tall, sombreroed man was sitting his horse at the far end of the clearing, two guns in his hand. The ship was facing toward him, practically, although he was not directly in front of it. It was undoubtedly the fifth member of the gang, very inopportunely returned.

Without conscious thought Groody made his decision. The motor would be a shield, and a moving ship is hard to hit. Somehow he felt sure the Padre and his daughter would O. K. his decision. They were thoroughbreds.

With a leap he was inside the cockpit, hunched behind the motor. The next instant, with throttle and spark full ahead, the great De Haviland was rushing head-on for the man with the guns. He must be somewhat of a gentleman, reflected Groody with a leaping heart, to hold his fire on account of the Joys. But after all, to shoot Joy would blast Barillo's cherished plans anyhow.

He chanced a glimpse over the side. The rider was waiting. The ship was fifty yards from him, five feet above the ground, when Groody stuck his head out. He saw the guns spit flame, and suddenly the ship began to vibrate badly.

"Nicked the end of the propeller," was Groody's mental observation.

The difference in weight between the tips, with the big stick whirling seventeen hundred times a minute, would cause the whole plane to shake itself to pieces in time.

The trip was a short one, however, and there was nothing to do but chance it. He lifted the ship over the mesquite, and flashed southward. There was practically no danger of a shot taking effect now. No living man can shoot with a pistol at a target going a hundred and twenty miles an hour and hit it through anything but luck.

He turned for a brief look at his passengers. Their backs were toward him, the Padre's uncovered white hair in wild disorder. That increasing vibration meant nothing to them—they were immersed in the thrill of watching the earth rush away behind them. The terrific speed was very obvious at the low altitude.

Groody turned grimly to his work. He fought the jolting bumps instinctively while his eyes roved ceaselessly from instrument to instrument, striving to detect the slightest deviation from their normal readings. Gas-lines might break, distributor-heads jar loose, numberless other things happen as a result of the torture the frail craft was going through, but the far-reaching mesquite below presented no opportunity for a safe landing.

Finally it happened. With a rush a section of the long exhaust-pipe on the left hand side rushed past him. Immediately he felt the hot blast of the exhaust flame swirling into the cockpit. The end section of the pipe, curved outward to divert the flame, had gone, and it was now sweeping directly back along the side, and the wind-currents from the propeller whirled it into the front cockpit. In the darkness an airplane motor shoots long streamers of flame, and although it is invisible in daylight, it is just as deadly, out of control, as it looks at night.

The leather padding around the edge of his cockpit began to smolder. With his bare hands Groody strove to smother it. His shirt was commencing to char slowly, and still the unconscious passengers watched the flat gray wilderness below.

With set lips and face beaded with sweat Groody searched the horizon for a possible landing-place, constantly beating at the tiny fires which started in his clothes and along the edge of the cockpit. He ought to land in the mesquite, chancing that the wreck would not be too bad, but the creed of the men who fly has always read that to the pilot belongs the risk, and lands-men come first.

Five long minutes—an eternity—and ahead loomed open country. From chest to waist the pilot felt as though his body was afire. His clothing was partially charred away, and still that horrible, invisible flame licked him. The entire cockpit padding was smoking.

He fought for consciousness as he dove, motor full on, for a long clearing a mile ahead. Wires sang their screeching song, and struts wabbled wildly in the grip of terrific speed and the unbalanced propeller. The earth was a blur to Groody, but with teeth sunk half through his lower lip he handled his big ship to the last.

The D. H. crashed through the fence at the edge of the field as though it had been made of paper, and the propeller flew into a thousand pieces. Groody used the last bit of will-power to wait for the moment of hovering which the experienced flyer feels just before his ship drops. He jerked back the stick blindly, and felt the wheels dig into the soft furrows of the cotton-field. As it nosed up he thought he saw some running figures emerging from the house at one side of the big cotton-patch. He did not hear the words of the unhurt Joys as his fingers closed automatically on the switches an instant before the force of the nose-up dashed his head against the out-thrust compass and blissful darkness settled over him.

SOME weeks later Groody climbed out of the back seat of one of the Laredo ships, waved good-by to the border pilot who had flown him back to Donovan Field, and walked slowly toward headquarters. He was a trifle thinner and considerably paler than before, but he acknowledged eager greetings with the same careless brevity as of old. He fought off eager seekers after information on the plea that he must report to Colonel Mills at once.

The adjutant pumped his hand enthusiastically, and the stenographers stopped work completely. Groody waited to be announced, lighting a cigar the while and extracting a folded sheet of paper from his shirt pocket. His face was a trifle grimed with oil, and his thick brown hair in scrambled disorder.

"Go ahead in," the adjutant told him, and Groody stalked into the sanctum sanctorum with deliberation.

He saluted the stocky, square-faced colonel, and waited.

"Sit down. Glad to see you. How do you feel?"

"Pretty good, sir."

"Now why in —— did you go to the border without authority, make us send every ship on the field out looking for you, and generally break every known regulation?" demanded the colonel abruptly.

"I have no alibis, colonel. And I'm saving you the trouble of arresting me and court-martialing me and then demanding my resignation."

His saturnine countenance did not change in the slightest as he tossed the type-written sheet on the C. O.'s desk.

"Hum. Resignation. Sorry, but you're right. Why in —— is it that so many good flyers are —— poor army officers?"

Groody smoked quietly, and did not answer. There were deep hollows below the high cheek-bones, but some of the harshness seemed to have left his face.

"Going to take Padre Joy's offer? He told me that an air-plane was the most logical method of transporting his platinum out of Mexico. I believe the Tulahua people are doing it now."

Groody nodded.

"Jim Weaver is hauling their stuff into Fort Bliss," he said.

For a few seconds he did not answer the first part of the Colonel's query. It had brought squarely up to him a decision which he had been trying to make for a month. It was as if his answer would be absolutely final, of necessity. Instinctively he felt that his "yes" or "no" now *would* be his final decision—and it was hard.

In his rare intervals of introspection Groody, perhaps because he thought so little about himself as a rule, possessed the rare quality of accurate self-estimation, unflavored by either excessive humility or conceit. In the month which had passed in constant association with Doreen Joy, there had stirred within him emotions which were new. And unless he misread the meaning of the expression he had occasionally surprized in her eyes——

And so the Padre's proposition, financially advantageous as it would be, meant far more than simply something to do. And in that moment in the colonel's office, a flashing moment of utter self-revealment came to Groody. It was as if he had momentarily rent the veil of the future, saw clearly, and knew the truth of his vision. Doreen, a home—and then, sooner or later, transcending those things, the irresistible call of the far places again. Chafing against any bonds which held him, no matter how strong; growing, gnawing discontent which would turn erstwhile happiness into a hateful millstone around his neck; shackled by the things he loved best—the thin face was set in harsher lines as he finally answered the colonel:

"No, I'm not taking the Padre's offer," he said. "How soon will the resignation go through, sir?"

"About thirty days. What are you going to do, Groody?"

"Go to Frisco and meet a friend of mine named Tom Service. After that—*quien sabe?*"

One corner of his mouth twitched slightly as he spoke. He saluted and walked out.

The colonel's puckered eyes were suddenly softer as he watched the tall flyer leave. He shook his head slightly as his lips soundlessly repeated Groody's query—

"Who knows?"

WASHAKIE

by Hugh Pendexter

WASHAKIE, chief of the Eastern Band of Shoshoni, deserves the monument placed over his grave at Fort Washakie, Wyoming. He was born in 1804, of mixed Shoshoni and Umatilla blood. He was always friendly with the whites and a magnificent fighter against his red enemies. More than nine thousand emigrants over the Oregon Trail signed a paper extolling his kindness in helping to recover lost stock, in aiding them over dangerous crossings, in leading back men who had strayed and become lost. This was in the Shoshoni country of Wyoming and during the great migrations of the Fifties.

In personal appearance he is described as being tall and powerful of build, of dignified bearing. When a young man he was autocratic as a chief and refused hospitality to any horse-thief or vagabond. He retained his great popularity in his tribe by his victories over the Blackfeet and Crows. He was employed at times by the American Fur Company, also the Hudson's Bay Fur Company, and more than once saved hunters and trappers from death.

He warned the hostile Shoshoni to leave the Bannocks, who were making a stand against Gen. Connor on Bear River in 1863, and took his own people to Fort Bridger. After the Bannock War he served the U. S. Government as scout in campaigns against the Ute, Cheyenne, Sioux and Arapaho, rendering very valuable services.

At the age of seventy the average white man begins to think of retiring. Not so with Washakie. Some of the newest generation decided he should be deposed.

Washakie vanished and was missing for two months. The council met to elect his successor. The old chief entered the lodge with dramatic abruptness and threw on the ground six enemy scalps he had taken while away. He continued as chief.

Men of his band served as scouts for the Government after the Custer defeat. Washakie died in early Winter of 1900 and was buried with military honors.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

OLD-TIME readers will be glad to meet *Mr. Harrington* again. In this issue W. Townend gives us the second of a new series of tales about the old engineers we used to meet before the war took Mr. Townend away from his pen.

FIFTY years of T. T. T. work ought to be entitled to a hearing at Camp-Fire:

Seattle, Washington.

Say, fellows, sit over and let an old-timer have "squat room" around the fire!

That's enough, thanks. I just wanted enough room to dip my oar into the puddle. I've been catching glimpses of this fire for many a weary "moon" but have never stepped into the firelight before. I am just another of those "I. T. T. T.'s" that you meet up with once in a while between the Arctic Circle and the Southern Cross.

KNOW what those four magical letters signify? No, the first letter does not stand for intellectual, it means industrious, and if fifty years of Typical Tropical Traveling does not entitle me to use the prefix "Industrious" I'll back out and sit down in the shadows, although I have always ridden the "cushions" but once and that was on the old "Red Stack" line from Fort Dodge to Albert Lea, the day that New Ulm was hit by a cyclone in '99. Say, brothers, it was rather comical to see the farmers unhitch from plows or harrows and skip for their cyclone pits. Had they looked a moment they could have known that the "twister" was 40 or 50 miles away and not headed in their direction. Well, that was one ride I never want to repeat, hotter than the hinges of ——, and a jug of water would have been worth twice the price of a first-class fare, so I swore off on the side-door Pullmans.

IN AUGUST, '84, on the west slope of the Rocky Mountains, I rebuilt a broken wagon-box into a very substantial coffin for a Glengary Scotch Canadian's last home. (A train load of us having left the cars at Laggan and hiked down the trail for the third crossing of the Wapta, or "Kicking Horse" River.) Tom McDonald, an old-time logger and lumberjack, at that time well known in Alpena and Saginaw, Mich., was the name put on the rude cross. Tom dropped dead on the trail and as I was carrying the only carpenter kit in the party it fell to myself and pal (Tom Shaw, a red-headed Englishman) to turn "undertakers" and we did the best we could. R. J. Woods, the company "manherder" was the chief mourner (?); at least he took possession of Mac's money and Winchester. My fee was a blanket which I carried for many years. I have often tried to find the relatives of the unfortunate man but he had absolutely no scratch of a pen on his person, and his fate is but one of the unsolved mysteries of life.

I would like to ask the brother from Dallas, Texas, how he found the canoeing down the Mississippi from Bemidji, Minn.? Larry St. John might make the trip, but I'll venture that if you could get with old Chief Bemidji (in the "Happy Hunting Ground") he would tell you Brainerd, Grand Rapids or Mississippi Landing would be much nearer to the "Father of Waters" than Bemidji. Look up the Topographical Surveys. I was in Bemidji before the last Indian raid and if a man can "Put in" the Mississippi river there it is something the oldest inhabitants never found out. The saw logs from Lake Bemidji were carried by trains to the river at Brainerd.—No. 12616.

SOMETHING from Frank C. Robertson in connection with his story in this issue:

Hatch, Idaho.

It may interest you to know that until ten years ago hundreds of thousands of sheep were driven over the trail shown twice each year. Despite the ridicule that has been heaped upon sheepherders those who followed this trail were real he-men. There were sheep towns along this trail just as wild and woolly as any towns in a cattle country. There are very few regular sheepherders who do not take a good man vacations. And usually when they come to town to celebrate they come with a bang.

Another thing—I followed the sheep myself with more or less regularity for seven years, and I have yet to meet my first "crazy" sheepherder. I have nothing against cowboys. I have been one myself and I like the life and the range, but in fiction they have got entirely too much glory at the expense of the sheps. From actual experience I happen to know that in most cases there was much to be said for and against both sides.—Frank C. Robertson.

INSTEAD of waiting to give you a more detailed account in a later issue, here are the main things that happened at the first meeting of our Expedition committee.

All of the committee were present except John Held, Jr., who was away from home and got no notices of the meeting until too late to get to New York, and Marshall Hall, who had planned to be present from Pittsburgh, but was held up at the last minute. Card announcements of the meeting were put in the Winchester windows for the benefit of readers in general, but couldn't be printed until almost too late for service. Nevertheless, Lewis E. Pepperman, Henry W. Fritz and Captain Dingle were present.

The committee present consisted of John L. Binda, J. E. Cox, J. Allan Dunn, Frederick Moore, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Henry Collins Walsh and Edgar Young. Cox, Barretto and Greene of the staff were all in line for the committee owing to the fact that Talbot Mundy, Arthur O. Friel and Harold Lamb were too far from New York to attend and William Patterson White could not leave home for the meeting. As previously explained, three of the staff on the committee seemed too many and we took the liberty of deciding among ourselves here in the office that, as Cox has had direct charge of the voting and other expedition matters, he was the one to represent the staff, even though the vote didn't make him next in line. I don't believe you'll consider this a reprehensible violation of the vote, since all three men concerned entirely agree in it.

THE first part of the evening was taken up in general discussion in order to arrive at comparatively common ground and get general bearings. Edgar Young spoke strongly against the Amazon as field to be explored, urging its monotony, the fact that much of the region has already been explored, etc. Several others were strong for the practical advantages offered by New Guinea. The fact remained that the readers had made the Amazon first choice, with Latin America in general well up to the head of the list, while New Guinea had fewer votes.

The committee, while itself rather inclined as a whole against the Amazon, realized that on such a point, it could hardly set aside the choice of the readers unless able to show sound practical cause. Accordingly it was voted that both places should be thoroughly investigated as to relative merits for our purpose. Museum authorities were to be consulted as to their angle on both. Reports to be made at a later meeting of the committee and final choice be put up to the readers as to these two places which to the committee seemed most promising, unless the Amazon case proved sufficiently strong.

I, being present though not of the committee, ventured that your vote for the Amazon did not mean a vote for the exploration of just the river itself but of some part of the general Amazon basin, which offers, of course, a far wider range of choice than some of the committee seemed to think was intended by the vote. If I've misrepresented the feelings of any of you, drop a line to the committee.

FOR the executive committee of three, the committee of nine elected Binda, Dunn and Young. The others now serve in advisory capacity and all decisions are to be made by the committee of three.

Personally, I sort of hankered to see Central America chosen—Yucatan or the general San Blas country, but we can't all of us have our particular wishes work out in a common enterprise and I'm fully ready to root for either the Amazon or New Guinea. My own interests, too, run rather to archeology and anthropology (not that I know anything about either one!), but I realize that the important thing is to find a plan that will give enough excitement to make good reading, produce scientific results of value, and yet make the expedition, so far as may be, pay its own way. It's up to our committee—and up to us to back them up.

Through "Camp-Fire" you'll be kept in touch with what is going on.

SOMETHING from Harold Lamb concerning the Tungusi who figure in his story in this issue:

> Any one who meddles with them is likely to be out of luck. More than three hundred years ago the Imperial Russian Government made this discovery when it tried to subject the Tungusi.
>
> THE Tungusi were nomad Tatar tribes who wandered over the most fertile part of the Mongolian steppe, where the river Yenesei drains from the Syansk mountains. Russian explorers reported that there were Steppe, Forest and Fisher Tungusi, and all were *sangars*—men who worked white magic.
>
> This was probably because the Tungusi lived to themselves and kept the customs of the time of Genghis Khan, which rather mystified the first white men who visited them. Then provincial officials looked them over from afar, saw that they kept animals, and named them Horse, Reindeer and Dog Tungusi, admitting that the Tungusi could not be made to pay taxes.
>
> This was because the Tungusi riders liked fighting with the bow, so that no one cared to face them with a musket until the musket became a rifle that could be loaded as fast as the Tungusi could deliver themselves of arrows. Also, the man who closed with the Tungusi, thinking that the tribesmen disliked cold steel, was out of luck.
>
> LASTLY, the Imperial Russian Government classified the Tungusi as Wandering, Nomadic, and Sedentary—the last alone paying taxes. It is a matter of record that the Sedentary Tungusi number less than one per cent. of the whole. Also that the most incorrigible are the Wandering (*alias* Steppe- and Reindeer-) Tungusi.
>
> The Chinese called them the *Chih-mao-tze*, the Red Haired People, and let it go at that, being careful not to meddle with the clansmen or their animals.
>
> On the other hand the Cossacks, the ancient and honorable foe of the Tatars, were ordered to meddle with the Tungusi. It was the Cossacks who called them *sangars*, white magicians, nearly three hundred years ago.
>
> Such things as talking to horses and summoning reindeer from a thousand miles away are not so easily explained by any administrative bureau. But strangers riding through the Tungusi steppe are careful not to do any injury to the private reindeer of the natives. It is one game preserve where no liberties are taken.
>
> No laws have ever been written about the reindeer of the Tungusi. It is a case, one might say, of unwritten law.—HAROLD LAMB.

HERE'S a letter that ought to make every good American do a little thinking. Personally I'd say that this letter itself fully justifies us in not taking the Germans to our bosom and kissing them on both cheeks, at least not just yet. Threats, hostility, sneers, abuse and ill-disguised hate. All Germans are not like this one, but some Germans are.

Judge for yourself:

> New York City.
>
> In June 18th issue of *Adventure* I find in first story, "When Good Fellows, etc.," remarks as to "Boches" and "Huns." Has it ever occurred to you *that these so called boches* and Huns are *readers* of *your* magazine? And steady readers too. Is it not about time to drop these expressions? To kick some *fool writers* out of the door, who still persist in bringing in trash like that? My regards to Thomson Burtis and I wish you would let him see this! It may not do him any good, but if he will inquire about the recently published casualty lists of all the Allies, he will find just *three* Allied soldiers got killed for one German soldier. Not a bad record. What do you personally think? That the U. S. got off, so to speak, with a black eye by not losing more men is entirely due to the short time she was in it. Another thing, why not call the English these names, as see what they are doing in Ireland! I have found these same remarks as to boches and Huns frequently in Camp-Fire letters of your magazine, where some misguided bum boasts of mostly imaginary doings.
>
> AS YOU probably know, about 90% of letters sent by U. S. soldiers to this country during the war were nothing but a pack of lies.
>
> What broke up and defeated Germany came from the inside (Socialism). As proof that I am right, you and your esteemed countryman will see in the *next great war* who is nearer as you think. And there will be no chance for the United States—no odds

5 to 1 in *favor* of the *U. S.* Every decent American knows there was not much glory in the last war for his country, no matter how much it is played up by papers. See the odds *five* and more *to one.*

Well, I will close. I should like to see this letter appear in "Camp-Fire," just to test the boasted fairness of *Adventure.* I'm German and will be forever.—WM. MADANS.

Well, German, what are you doing in this country which you seem to dislike so intensely?

IN ROBERT SIMPSON'S serial beginning in this issue the central character, *Charteris*, well, who and what is he? It's a perfectly good story just as it lies but some of you will get a hunch—though perhaps not till the very last page—as to the inner, real meaning of this man. If you do, it will give the story a very particular appeal over and above its regular story value. Something to think about both before and after the last page. If you "get next" (it won't be especially easy), drop me a line. I'd like to know how many see the inner meaning. I was told in advance, so don't know whether I could have guessed or not.

THIS craze for passing laws prohibiting American citizens from owning revolvers—who or what is back of it? It is hardly possible that it is merely lack of intelligence that's pushing the movement along. Pushing it rather systematically.

Who would profit by these laws? The crooks, Bolshevists and other revolutionaries, foreign nations with hostile designs on us for the future, perhaps some of our employer barons. Well, then, why not begin looking for the nigger in the wood-pile. What individuals are pushing this? What are their affiliations? Is this kind of unintelligent action characteristic of them or does this seem a case by itself?

Who? Why?

Meanwhile, here is a statement issued by the United States Revolver Association, W. A. Morrall, Secretary-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, Ohio. After this their address will be found regularly in this magazine, under "Standing Information." Members of their legislative committee are A. C. Hurlburt, P. O. drawer 1378, Hartford, Connecticut, and Karl T. Frederick, 27 William Street, New York City. This "Sullivan law" thing is being pushed systematically. It must be fought systematically. If interested, why not write to the U. S. R. A. for data and to offer cooperation. Meanwhile get busy on your State legislature and also investigate the people back of the movement.

The Truth About the Sullivan (Anti-Revolver) Laws

A disinterested intelligent, statistical study of the most complicated problem confronting State Legislatures, containing quotations from Supreme Court Justices, jurists, newspaper editorials, the Burglary Underwriters Association, public prosecutors and criminologists, from the United States Revolver Association, the chartered, parent and recognized national organization of the revolver and pistol marksmen of the United States, whose objects are to foster and develop revolver and pistol shooting; to establish and preserve records, and exercise a general supervision over the sport. *This association is not interested financially, directly or indirectly, in the manufacture of arms or ammunition.*

If a law were framed which would prevent the abuse of firearms without interfering with their legitimate use, many crimes of violence would be prevented.

The impracticability of the suppressive method of a regulation is obvious when we look at the extensive violation of the prohibition laws. The discovery of smuggled or secreted weapons would be a thousand times more difficult. Can any one believe that the purchase license would disarm the crook? The combined efforts of all the police in the country do not prevent the burglar from having or using his kit of burglar tools.

Aiming such a thing as a purchase-license law at a crook and bulls'-eyeing the law-abiding citizens with it is aiming at the hawk and hitting the hen.

Deterring law-abiding citizens from obtaining firearms so as to protect them from criminals may sound like a grim joke, yet this is precisely the remedy which certain dreamers have in mind.

Expecting thugs and crooks who live by taking their very lives in their hands to balk at the slap across the wrist of a prison sentence when caught with concealed weapons is one way of expressing all of the hope without any of the sense of a simian.

Ever since 1912, when New York enacted its notorious "Sullivan Revolver Law," which required all citizens who wish to provide themselves with firearms for home protection to take out a license which permits them to buy a pistol or a revolver, the United States Revolver Association has studied this perplexing problem of pistol legislation with the honest purpose of solving this conundrum.

Throughout that time we have voluntarily and disinterestedly disseminated our conclusions throughout the United States among State Legislatures interested in this vital subject, our sole motive being a public-spiritedness befitting the greatest amateur sporting organization of its kind in the country.

Very briefly:—

1. We find that in New York City, where a purchasing license law has been operative since September of 1912, this law has on the one hand failed utterly in preventing criminals from obtaining arms right in the heart of New York City, whereas, on the other hand, *law-abiding* citizens have been practically *disarmed.*

Expressed in figures, the sale of pistols and revolvers to law-abiding citizens fell off more than ninety-four per cent. under the Sullivan Law while—according to a special article by Coroner's Clerk Le Brun in The New York *Times*—more than 5,000 revolvers and pistols were surreptitiously sold, annually, to crooks and criminals on New York's East Side.

2. We find that whatever theoretical excuse may be advanced for purchase-license laws in cities, where there is at least a semblance of police protection, when it comes to deterring the purchase of pistols by that vast majority of citizens that live in towns, villages and rural districts, where there is no police protection, and where each is the preserver of his own life, a purchase-license-law is little short of criminal, for it means the death warrant of each murder-victim who would have been able to save his life had his State not deterred him from obtaining arms for legitimate self-defense.

3. We find, not only from experience in New York City, but likewise from the experience in Chicago and Cleveland—where there are purchase-license ordinances—that the more law-abiding citizens are deterred from obtaining weapons, the greater the increase of burglaries, robberies, hold-ups and other crimes that lead to murder.

4. We find that the increase of crime is due, totally aside from the war's reaction, not to revolvers and pistols per se, but to an increasing number of individuals who are incited to crimes of violence and desire to misuse these arms; and we find that this desire is constantly being fanned into flame by lurid motion picture shows which commonize the use of pistols, often even in "comedy" exhibitions, and by the yellow press, which lionizes perpetrators of crimes by "writing them up" even in news stories as the centers of interest in "thrilling get-away adventure" stories, or else in "detective" or "mystery" yarns of the sort that appeal to the primitive mind.

The Solution

There is a solution to this pistol problem. The crook can be wiped out. It is necessary only to aim at the right bull's-eye. It is the *abuse* of firearms we are after. Then why not *aim* at *this?* It is the *legitimate* use of the firearm which stands out as *desirable*—then why, in the name of reason, interfere with it?

The most drastic mandatory laws against carrying weapons concealed on the person without a license, based on an automatic sliding scale for first and for second offenders, for criminals with a record, and for those caught in the act of attempting to commit crimes with these weapons, is the first step toward a Bullet Proof Revolver Law.

The second step is:—Punishment designed with an eye to "crook" psychology. Degradation—if necessary a Delaware whipping-post—would take the braggadocio out of glorying, strutting, swaggering criminals, basking ~~in~~ mere prison records as so many hall marks of "bravery" and "nerve."

"Take the pistol from the crook, but do not take self-protection from the weak, from the frail, from the harmless ones who ask no more than the means with which to protect their lives. Do not take the pistol from courageous law-abiding citizens who are not afraid to meet force with force and bag human beasts of prey, thus preventing a crime and putting the criminal behind the bars."

At the critical moment, a pistol in the hand is worth a squad of police around the corner. The bare presumption that a home MAY be protected with a pistol is a *mighty* deterrent of crime against the law-abiding. The pistol in the home is the greatest adjunct of a police department.

The following are brief extracts from editorials concerning pistol laws that aim at the heart of home protection by deterring law-abiding citizens from obtaining fire-arms:

"The Sullivan Law is one of the most signal instances of futile legislation on record."—New York *World*.

"The object of pistol legislation should be to INCREASE the use of pistols for self-protection and diminish the other uses."—San Francisco *Chronicle*.

"The Sullivan Law has made not only its sponsor but the State ridiculous."—New York *Sun*.

"New York's crime record since the Sullivan Law went into effect constitutes pretty conclusive proof that the law has utterly failed to do what its author promised."—The New Orleans *Times-Democrat*.

"A law which notifies crooks that their prospective victims are weaponless is worse than a failure."—St. Joseph (Mo.) *News-Press*.

"We suggest that the Sullivan Law be amended to permit purchasers of weapons for home defense to obtain these without requiring the purchase license."—Extract from the open letter of The Burglary Insurance Underwriters' Association to the Legislature of New York State.

"If it were possible by process of law to compel every citizen to own a pistol and at the same time learn to shoot straight with it, there would be little work left for detectives to do."—W. J. Burns.

"That terrible piece of legislation called 'The Sullivan Revolver Law' that works injury to the honest citizen, but offers no protection for that citizen against the crook."—Supreme Court Justice Goff.

"For protection in his own home the respectable citizen is compelled to rely upon himself and such means of defense as he may have at hand."—Supreme Court Justices Scott and Ingraham.

A copy of the Association booklet "The Case against the Anti-Revolver Law" will be sent promptly on request."—W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, Ohio.

NO REASON that I can see why our younger comrades shouldn't join now and then in our talks round the Camp-Fire. Our younger members are a good lot, have due respect for the graybeards and anyhow isn't it interesting to hear from those now treading their first trails?

East Liverpool, Ohio.

Maybe my youth has prevented me pushing forward sooner (as I have just jumped the line) as the presence of so many old-timers telling of their travels and experiences sure make me and mine feel diminutive.

ANYWAY after receiving a diploma for four years of high school, and loving the great outdoors, I packed up my few belongings and hit for the harvest fields of the Middle West, where I worked the harvest. Returning East I soon got tired too of the humdrum existence and again left for the Pacific coast, where I saw what I thought was some beautiful country and had some tame experiences alongside of what you old-timers tell. I will never forget the time in Idaho my Buddie and I first climbed the tops for our first stolen ride, on our way to Portland thence to Sacramento and back to Reno. That was sure some trip for me and my Buddie, but you and your experiences made it look like nothing, but (if you ever beat your way) how did your first ride on top of a fast mail affect you?

Returning East, have been taking short trips of no consequence; last year a canoe trip on the Ohio and Allegheny with bad weather, and this year I am preparing now for a trip down the beautiful river. No time limit and New Orleans isn't any too far. —NORMAN N. DURBIN.

P. S.—The name on the bow of our canoe was last year, and shall be this year, *Adventure*.

IN ADDITION to the Adventurers' Clubs of New York and Chicago one has recently been organized in Los Angeles, according to the *Bulletin* of the Chicago club. Here's luck to it.

THE clipping referred to by our Australian comrade in the following concerned one of the shrunken heads from the west coast of South America which was brought to Sydney by Captain P. W. Englebach, who carries it with him everywhere.

Sydney, New South Wales.

Herewith a newspaper cutting from a recent issue of the *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, which may be of interest to the comrades of the 71, in view of the recent matter we've had handed out to us by those who know.

Also in view of Mr. Thomson Burtis' story "Dumpy Puts One Over," it may interest you all to know that the "Flying Smiths" on their England-Australia trip had to descend with a propeller broken through striking a small hawk. The wing of the hawk has been forwarded as a souvenir with the airplane to the Commonwealth Historical Museum.—ALLAN J. CLARKE.

INTERNATIONAL politics are mixed enough and bad enough to satisfy almost anybody, but the Italy of F. R. Buckley's story in this issue makes them look like a straightforward game of solitaire. People used fewer words and more stilettos in those days, so the amount of action was greater to the square inch. Mr. Buckley, as he states below, has simplified the political tangle, but he couldn't draw a true picture of the times without depicting a pretty constant flow of departures from this world to the next. To make doubly sure of plenty of excitement he has put an Irishman down in the very middle of things.

The Irishman's being there is natural enough; from somewhere back around the sixth century Irishmen were to be found pretty well all over Europe. First they went mostly as missionaries and scholars, for in those early centuries Ireland led all western Europe in learning and was a foremost spreader of Christianity. From Europe's earliest Christian universities in Italy to Louvain in Belgium and from France and Spain as far east as Hungary you will find Irish foundations or traces of them. Back when the English were about as uneducated as savages the Irish had a host of schools where Greek, Latin, poetry, mathematics, astronomy and many other things were taught—among other things, Ptolemy's theory that the earth was round, not flat. When the Emperor of Byzantium sent the gift of a Greek manuscript to Charlemagne, among all the scholars gathered together by that Frankish monarch the only one who could translate it was an Irishman educated in Ireland.

Later the Irish went scattering over Europe because the English invaders made Ireland a hell for them—the Wild Geese they came to be called. Many rose to high rank in both war and peace. For fifteen hundred years Ireland has been sending of its best, voluntarily or involuntarily, to the rest of the world at large. English historians are sadly inclined to minimize Ireland's splendid part in the advancement of the world, and Irishmen are rather inclined to exaggerate what doesn't need exaggeration, but French, German and Italian historians and philologists are neutral and Ireland can well afford to rest the story of her magnificent past upon their findings. And now comes Talbot Mundy telling us about the Ark of the Covenant's having been taken to Ireland and all that that means!

When you consider that Ireland has hung on in spite of, first, Danes and Scandinavians and, second, the English—two invasions calculated to crush out of existence an ordinary people, to say nothing of their learning and general civilization, well, you can view with a more lenient eye Ireland's present reactions when she is at last allowed again to more or less manage her own affairs.

ALL RIGHT, come ahead, you pro-British readers; accuse me of cold-blooded anti-British propaganda. Been getting quite a lot of cussing lately—I don't know just why—for being pro-British, so I'll not mind a change. All kinds of races and religions cuss me at times, accusing the magazine and me of propaganda for this or for that and at the same time for propaganda against the very same. It's funny, and yet there's a sad and depressing side to it. You accusers, I'll explain my pros and antis to you, the magazine's and mine. We're pro-American, —— you! Things have come to such a pass that Americans can't express opinions on anybody outside their own country without being accused of being propagandists for or against some foreign country. There are so many foreign interests so busily at work in our country (for their own gain) that they've actually got to the stage where they can't conceive of a real American's being merely a real American.

They are so in the habit of thinking of America last, not at all, or as a victim that they forget there are still quite a few Americans who think of her first and for her own sake. So long as an American holds his own country first he is entitled to think what he pleases about any other country and to say what he thinks, and any one who doesn't like it is entitled to go to ——.

As for this magazine, it is doing no propaganda for or against any foreign country. It has no intention of doing any, unless America's own interests call for it and in that case it will do it openly.

THIS country is rotten with pro-British, pro-Irish and pro scores of other nations. If I could I'd wipe out all of it, lock, stock and barrel. The only kind of propaganda we need in this country is pro-American propaganda and we need it very badly. Not narrow, eagle-screaming Americanism but the kind that is for America before all other nations, yet ready to make her foremost in doing her part toward a peaceful brotherhood of nations whenever there is sane opportunity to act rightly, justly and without the partizanship of self-interest or personal affiliations abroad.

Yes, letters accusing me of propaganda for or against some foreign country make me sore. Not sore because I'm accused, but sore because every letter accusing me of propaganda against any foreign country is pretty sure evidence that the writer thereof is himself engaged in propaganda *for* that country—another critter living here in and off America and working for some other country. There are too many such critters.

Let's go back to Italy in the time of Benvenuto Cellini. Italians have not done much clamoring about the magazine's propaganda for or against Italy and maybe they'll let us get by with Mr. Buckley's story of Italy's past.

Though none, as a general rule, has greater respect for symbolic ladies than myself, I have, in this instance, shoved the Goddess of History into a corner, pulled her hair over her eyes and hit her in the jaw with her stone tablet. My motives, however, were excellent; I merely wished to save my friends of the Camp-Fire from the headaches which would certainly have been theirs if I had handed them simultaneously a plot and Florentine history in an unsimplified form.

IN THE story itself, I state that "the citizens were plotting against the Council, the Council against the Duke; the nobles against the citizens, the Duke, the Council, and each other; while all parties . . . trucked . . . with the exiles of Siena, Lucca, and Venice." This indicates a fairly complicated condition of intrigue; but in point of fact, matters were still more involved. For instance, there was the Pope to be considered; and the Emperor Charles of the Holy Roman Empire; several local Dukes; Filippo Strozzi and his wife; and various others: including (until he was poisoned by Duke Alessandro) Ippolito, the bastard cousin of the bastard Duke. Moreover, internecine strife was by no means confined to the nobles. The people's party was divided by intrigues, and so was the Council. And any two hostile parties would cheerfully combine for the time being, if by so doing, they thought they could gain the advantage over any third. On the outskirts of the whole muddle, moreover, ready to assist or betray any party as occasion demanded, stood the great merchants, one of whom I have endeavored to depict in the character of *Ugo Ginori*. The Ginori appear in fact to have been a family with pretensions to nobility; but one branch of the family seems to have been interested in trade.

SO MUCH for the headaches. I have also endeavored to save blushes. Duke Alessandro was not only a great deal worse morally than I have indicated, but, in addition to looking like a mulatto, actually was half black, as well as illegitimate. His mother, a negro slave, was expeditiously poisoned when her son became Duke. As for Lorenzo, or Lorenzino, the Duke's boon-companion and assistant in affairs of the heart, it has not yet been decided just what he was; the evidence seems to indicate a make-up of 45% genius and 55% insanity. He wrote remarkable verse and drama; he worshiped beauty; evidently (according to Benvenuto Cellini) premeditated the murder of the Duke for some months; and it is still a moot point whether, in slaying his friend, he did not esteem himself to be playing the part of a liberator. The historical version of the slaying is that Lorenzo decoyed the Duke to his apartments by the promise of a meeting with a desirable lady named Ginori—a relative of Lorenzo's—and that he then stabbed him to death, with the assistance of the professional bravo who figures in the story. Having fled Florence, Lorenzo published a scholarly defense of his action; to which Duke Cosimo II, having, perhaps, devoted the ten intervening years to consideration of his reply, made crushing repartee by having him assassinated.

STUDENTS of the period will notice other points at which my story departs from strict history and chronology; though I have endeavored to adhere to the general outline of the facts; and have had good reasons—as indicated above—for my departures. For detail and atmosphere, I have joined the great majority of period romancers in drawing on the "Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini."—F. R. BUCKLEY.

CONCERNING his story in this issue a few words from Captain Dingle:

Bermuda.

I had a boatswain during the Boer War, from whom I have taken the character, in general, of *Starbuck*. He had held fine commands, but violent temper forced him out of the passenger lines and sent him back to sailing ships. He came to my transport in Cape Town just out of jail, and, all my crew with a few exceptions (who might as well have gone too) having deserted the ship to join one or other of the troops of Irregular Cavalry then forming, I shipped him, record and all.

He had no scruples at all about telling me that he had been jailed for tearing a boy's ear off because the youngster dropped an egg in taking it from the chicken-coop. In fact, he seemed utterly unable to understand that other men would not do the same.

So far as I know, the real man never redeemed himself as I have made *Starbuck* do. I never heard of him after he, too, jumped the ship in Port Elizabeth to go to the war. But I shall always remember him stopping as he passed me on deck one night, his face working queerly in the light of a porthole, and addressing me, not as boatswain to master, but in tones of perfect and unassumed equality:

"Dingle, why the —— do men hate me so?"

There was a small sealing schooner of Cape Town named *Aventure* that was wrecked on the Crozets. From these materials "Evil Starbuck" grew.—DINGLE.

YOU remember "Barehanded Castaways" by J. Allan Dunn, written to afford a change from the usual type of "desert island" story and received with such favor. Well, why not have variations from some other types of stories? You, like us in the office, have read hundreds of stories of this, that or the other type, good stories that hold the interest but that are nevertheless merely variations of the same general plot. In "Barehanded Castaways" all the usual "props" of that type of story were deliberately barred out—no treasure, no pirates, no rival party, no earthquake or volcano, no women, no savages, no specialists in the party, no supply of handy tools or handy anything else except raw material, no flora and fauna laying ready-made food and clothing in the laps of the castaways. And you "ate up" that story.

Well, how about some of the other types—treasure-hunting stories, open-boat or derelict stories, civil engineer stories and all the rest? Not just variations of the usual fundamental plot but a story of each type that is different from the ground up. If you want some story of this kind, tell us just how and in what respect you want it to be different from the usual kind and address your letter to J. E. Cox here in the office. He'll make it his special business to take care of these letters and pass on to all the rest of us here the results of this informal vote. Then we'll do our best to get some of our writers to write those stories.

Our magazine has always had a welcome for stories that got away from the usual grooves and, as you know, our pages have been marked by a goodly number of them. But this time we're talking about stories that are still more different.

It's up to you.

Incidentally I might mention the fact that, while we've always given special attention to letters of praise and criticism for our stories and authors and for any specific features of the magazine, all such letters now find their way eventually into Barretto's hands and he makes a business of keeping an exact record of them for the benefit of all of us. Which is quite a job but a very worth-while one. The more specific and definite you make your criticisms, the more directly they'll register your likes and dislikes in the final result, the getting of the authors and kinds of story you, the readers, most want to see in our magazine. If you like you can mail your criticisms direct to L. B. Barretto, knowing that through him they'll reach every one of the seven of us.

Now, how about these "altogether different" stories?

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free identification card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchange; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

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3. Islands and Coasts
4, 5. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
6. Australia and Tasmania
7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
8. New Guinea
9. Philippine Islands
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13—19. Africa. In Seven Parts
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Mountains and Mountaineering
Standing Information

The Pagosa and Lone Cone Regions

WHERE the hunting rivals the trapping and fishing:

Question:—"Am writing you in regards to the country in southern Utah and northern New Mexico for a couple of young fellows to spend the Winter in the mountains. Is it possible to pay at least part of one's expenses by trapping, and is there anything to hunt in that country? Does it get very cold there in Winter? Could a person get hold of a cabin, or would he have to provide for something of that sort? In fact I would like to know almost everything in general about the country and what success a trip of that sort would be.

We have both roamed around quite a bit, but never have done anything of this sort before, except a bit of hunting; so if you would be kind enough to advise us we would appreciate it very much."—D. H. PERRINE, Ellsworth, Kan.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—I'd sure like to take you boys down to the Southwest and show you, instead of trying to tap out a dry description on this machine. The sage is purple—cottonwoods are in full leaf—the peach-trees on the home ranch are shell pink, and the rainbows are biting like starved coyotes.

Don't think you'd care much for New Mexico, for what you're after. Parts of southern Utah are O. K., among the Blue Mountains or close to the Colorado line; say, near the headwaters of the Rio Grande, or any of the tributaries of the San Juan River. You can get hunting and fishing 'most anywhere in the sections named, or in New Mexico and Arizona, but for the best trapping I always prefer to get up into the foothills, where the streams are pure and cold. Fur is much better, too.

You can get coyotes, cotton-tail and jack-rabbits, sage hens, prairie dogs, plenty of wild pigeons, and ducks on the lakes and sloughs in the season, in New Mexico. Deer also come down from the hills in November in droves, and the Utes, Apaches and Navahos, as wards of Uncle Sam, slaughter them in great numbers. Beside this, you'll have to get used to alkali water, sand and heap plenty wind, in New Mexico. I've had some great treks down there, just to find out what's around the next bend in the cañon, or over the top of the next mesa. Just adventure, you *sabe;* not so much for prime hunting, fishing or trapping.

Here's something that will show you: The *hombres* who live down there travel *north* to the foothills, when they want to use a rod, or a gun for anything except self-defense.

Go to Denver (or Pueblo) and then *via* D. & R. G. R. R. to Trinidad on the Santa Fé, then south. Or, better, keep on *via* D. & R. G. R. R. to Antonito and south along the lower Cumbres Range to Varranca or Española. You'll have to hire saddle-horses or get your stuff packed by wagon, mule, or auto into the hills. Any of it is good, of its kind.

Personally I'd keep on the train until I reached Pagosa, then transfer to the short branch line running up to Pagosa Springs. In the latter place you are in close touch with as good country for what you want as any in the Southwest; bear (cinnamon and grizzly) blacktail deer, mountain lion, fox, beaver, marten and sable, mink, muskrat, swarms of bobcat, otter, fisher, badger, blue grouse, pheasant, ruffed grouse, California quail, wild turkey, etc., and every stream alive with rainbow, native, or Eastern brook trout. Up in the higher rocky cliff sections there are plenty of mountain sheep, too, but not for you—there is a perpetual close season on them in Colorado.

The above goes also for southern Utah in the hill country, as far as game and fishing goes. You can go to Green River on the D. & R. G. and then south along the Green River into the hills, which lie back from the Grand Cañon upper reaches.

Another good section, which I think is next to the Pagosa country, is the Lone Cone region, in Montezuma County, southwestern Colorado, near the Utah line. To get there you keep on the D. & R. G. to Durango; then *via* Rio Grande Southern to Cortez. In Cortez inquire for Jim Nash, who has a ranch on Disappointment Creek, tell him I sent you out there and I think you'll be sure of a welcome. He can put you on to all the ropes before you'll be ready to select your camp-site.

Your fare from Denver to Durango will be around $18; at least that was the price when I was last there in 1915. Fare to Pagosa Springs is somewhat less; likewise, the fare to Antonito is a bit less than to Pagosa.

In any case, you must be prepared to get (or hire) saddle and pack horses. You can't get anywhere in the Southwest without a broom-tail of some sort. Of course, it *is* possible to get a burro to pack your outfit and then "hoof it" behind that long-eared bunch of contrariness. Horses of a sort, however, may be had fairly cheap, and are much more satisfactory. In 1914 you could get an Indian bronc for around ten dollars, good enough for any trip into the hills, either to ride or pack.

You can always get a second-hand tent in that country, and by flooring it and running about three courses of boards up the walls make it plenty warm for all Winter. That is, with an ordinary sheet-iron camp-stove for cooking and heating. There are supply and outfitting stores in Durango. By careful buying and selecting, you should get a very fair outfit for a Winter trapping trip *exclusive* of transportation—railroad and horse—for about $100.

Now, as to climate: It gets no colder there than in most middle-West States; in fact one feels the cold less than in many of the latter in which I've been. The snow gets pretty deep in the hills proper, but among the foothills a foot or two is unusual. Durango, Dolores, Cortez, and Bluff have comparatively little snow.

My advice to you boys is this: Take what cash you can raise and go as far as it will take you, toward either Pagosa or the Disappointment country. I wish I could go along, too, but I hope you go; and good luck to you. Let me know what you do; and any further details you may wish to learn I shall be only too glad to furnish.

Here's good hunting!

P. S.—I neglected a word about firearms, etc. Any modern rifle will do, although I prefer a Winchester .30-30 for general use in the country mentioned. Don't bother packing a six-gun—they're of no earthly use and are always in the way. Few "bad-men" now in the Southwest, and if there were, you'd better not have a gun of any sort.

As to traps: If you're not wise on this point, any standard trapper's guide will give you reliable data. Any book-store or public library carries them.

Empty log cabins are "chancy." Local ranchers might know of them, or you could put one up yourselves in little time (I've done it more than once). On the Forest Reservations get a permit. I think a floored house-tent is your best bet.

If you've the spirit of adventure in your blood, you'll not take this out in mere *thinking*. Go ahead and *just do it!* You'll come out all right and have an invaluable experience as well.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each department are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Note from an "A. A." Man

BROTHER Middleton has had some hard luck. Listen to him tell it:

It got around to be house-cleaning time a few days ago (April 24, to be exact) so we carried furniture, bedding, etc., out into the yard. Then as my desk was too heavy to move handily I decided to empty the drawers. I carried out an armful of "A. A." stationery, correspondence, etc., and laid it on a couch. I had not much more than got into the house when along came one of our gentle Wyoming zephyrs with a tail to it that looked like a corkscrew or a whirlygig; and, believe me, it was sure doing fine. The business end landed on the couch, square in the middle of things.

Wife, youngest daughter and myself got out just in time to see things happen. Of course we started in pursuit; but there were only three of us. Instead of there being only four corners to this universe I'll swear there are at least eight; and most of the things on that couch went to the other five.

We did the best we could; but when we finally wiped our perspiring brows and the ladies had got their hair on straight again we saw it was a sad assortment we had got together. Questions from would-be Indian-slayers and cow-punchers were hand in hand with queries from sedate homesteaders and Eastern tourists. Also there are a great many questions missing that can never be found.

So if any of you fellows wrote Brother Middleton and got no answer, why just make allowances and write him again. He doesn't clean house every day.

Life on the Upper Congo

NOT much comfort for either whites or blacks, though conditions are changing for the better:

Question:—"Would you kindly advise me as to the living conditions for both whites and blacks in city or village on the upper Congo. Also their religious beliefs and whether the natives believe in witchcraft or not?"—CHAS. R. WHITEHOUSE, Cambridge, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—The living conditions in the upper Congo for whites are those of nearly all pioneer places in Africa. Houses mostly of brick or mud with thatch roofs, sometimes corrugated iron; feeding mostly canned stuff varied with locally grown vegetables and game—latter depends upon the district; on the uplands climate quite suited for whites—never very hot, and cool at nights; in the valleys jungle conditions prevail, steamy heat with consequent malaria, blackwater, spirillum, and sleeping sickness in certain places.

There are several mines of gold and copper, and in the last ten years plantations, coffee and cotton, have been started on the uplands. Roads are rapidly being made throughout for the use of automobiles, which will be one of the best methods of transport for the future.

For blacks houses again vary muchly; most are pretty poor living in—for natives—mere grass shacks; but those conditions are altering since the days of the Leopold administration. They grow mostly corn of various kinds and bananas, and collect rubber, etc.

Religious belief is somewhat of a complicated question. Roughly a primitive form of animism, believing that trees, rivers, etc., have spirits which are malign and therefore to be propitiated.

Registered Guides

YOU'VE got to have 'em in Maine, unless you belong there or live in a properly chaperoned camp:

Question:—"Can three young men—one of whom has lived in Maine for about ten or eleven months and two from here—hunt in Maine without hiring a guide? We expect to stay there if the country strikes us right. Not only to hunt but to work, as our intentions are to become permanent citizens in the northern part of the State.

We would not, in fact, be able to hire a guide as our resources are not any too large; but we would be able to take care of ourselves in the woods, having roughed it all our lives. A few years ago I and a friend from upper New York State hunted, camped and trapped in Wyoming an entire Winter, so I think that we would be able to take care of ourselves as the others have done practically the same thing.

Is there fur in any quantity to be had in the north and northeastern section of the State, and what kind?

Is the .30-30 the right gun? Would you kindly answer as soon as possible as we expect to leave by September 28th? Especially in regard to guides."—T. W. KOENIG, Holden, Mass.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—The game laws of the State say, "Non-residents of the State shall not enter upon any organized township of the State and camp and build fires while engaged in fishing or hunting, without being in charge of a registered guide." If you stopped at a sporting camp, and did not build fires outside, a guide would not be necessary. You would all have to take out a non-resident hunter's license, the cost of which is $15 for deer; and if you go after moose it is $25.

There are good catches of fur made in the State. Mink, fox, otter, muskrat, weasel, black cat, skunk, etc.

The .30-30 is a gun that suits me as well as any gun made, and I think there are more of them used in Maine than any other.

Porto Rico

THERE are opportunities there, to be sure; but the old warning holds true; look before you leap:

Question:—"What is the general climate of Porto Rico? What are their chief ways of traveling?

What kind of people are they? Are they very progressive? What are their chief exports and imports? Is the country mountainous or rather level? What language is spoken there? Is it mostly Spanish? Do they manufacture much or do they export raw? How are living conditions generally?"—DON LENWELL, Oceanport, N. J.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—The climate of Porto Rico varies greatly at the two extreme ends, the north and east being deluged frequently with heavy rains, while at the other end of the island it is often unpleasantly dry. But generally speaking the climate is good, and would be very good indeed but for a certain excess of humidity in parts. Anyhow, it is pleasant enough. Temperatures range from about 55 to 95 or 100, but 100 is reached very rarely.

Means of travel was almost exclusively by automobile along the fine roads when I was last there. So far as I know the car is still the chief means of travel; but this can be better ascertained, since progress is the rule down there, by writing to the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Washington, D. C., where you can also get the most recent information on developments and opportunities there.

Exports are coffee, sugar, tobacco, cotton, among others, and imports rice, iron and steel, wheat flour, machinery, etc. The interior is rugged, and the railways were only running on the coastal levels, though, as I remark above, progress is the word there, and another condition may have arisen now. The language was Spanish, and is now largely inland, but American is growing in favor and will undoubtedly become the sole language eventually.

Taken all around, Porto Rico should offer plenty of opportunities to young settlers, particularly if a knowledge of modern business or motor engineering is taken down there.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Cherimoya Fruit

COMMON as it is in Latin America, it is as little known to the inhabitants of the United States as was the banana fifty years ago—and maybe some day will become as common here as the banana is now. If so, there'll likely be another crop of millionaires:

Question:—"The proposition is this: I am offered a position with a company which proposes to plant coconut palms on a plantation at Agricola. The claim is made that the few wild coconuts found in Guatemala are of a very high grade and that the San Blas coconut palms planted by Mr. Kellog, who has lived there for seven years, are a success. Incidentally I am offered an opportunity (not obligatory) of investing in this plantation.

The salary offered me is not glorious enough to make me jump at the chance unless I see where I can better myself in other ways.

Do you know of any reason why this proposition would not be practicable or possible?

Any information you can give me on this particular subject and locality will be greatly appreciated."
—WOLMER HANSEN, Deer Lodge, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—In all such propositions as mentioned in your letter, the sure value of trustworthy character and good judgment of the men constituting the management of the enterprise is the first thing to be satisfied of; next the character of the land, then the particular product, and also as to whether it may be improved upon so as to get a better price.

A safe plan would be to take an option on a certain interest, then go to the property and prove out what was there and the probabilities and possibilities for the future.

There is for a certainty a market for good coconuts the world over.

The San Blas Indians (otherwise known as Cunacuna) excel in agricultural pursuits; the whole coast, as well as the numerous islands of Mandingo Bay and farther east, are lined with extensive coconut-palm groves, of a variety which is remarkable for the *superiority* in quality and *shape* of the nuts.

Those are the best ones for your proposition.

Another thing that might be worth while for you to study up on is the growing of the fruit of the cherimoya tree and the shipping of this fruit to U. S. A. markets. It requires much careful study and experimenting to become an expert, which same you must be to make a big success.

You might begin this study by reading an article by F. W. Popeno, "West India Gardens, Altadena, Calif." being the name of an article which appeared in the *Pomona College Journal of Economic Botany*; send for it.

The first mouthful of this fruit convinces ninety-five out of a hundred that they want more of it; thus showing you that you will find an immediate market at any city where you can successfully ship them; this you can find out only by actual experiment. From Mexico to Chile this fruit is the chosen table fruit.

The best of them grow to be five to six inches long and weigh from one to one and a half pounds. To my taste they beat any ice cream that ever was made by the best makers.

The land laws of Guatemala are liberal, in order to encourage settlers from other countries to locate there. The public lands are divided into lots of not more than fifteen *caballerias* which are sold for a price ranging from $250 to $300 each by the Government. A *caballeria* comprises one hundred and thirteen and five-eighth acres.

Premiums have been offered by the Government for the cultivation of India rubber, cacao (from which chocolate is made) sarsaparilla, cotton and tobacco; and no tax will be levied for ten years on lands devoted to the cultivation of these products. The small farmer can not, however, make a small farm pay as well as in northern lands, for he can not stand it to work so hard and so regularly. Plantations to be successful should be large enough to justify the establishment of a colony of peon laborers on the premises.

Vacant lands of the republic may be claimed by a written petition, offering three witnesses, who must declare they know that the land claimed is not owned by anybody. If anybody opposes the claim within thirty days from the publication the papers are sent to the Interior Department, which appoints a surveyor if the land is not needed for public use.

The applicant must pay the expense of the survey, but the amount paid is credited to the price of the land. If the survey is approved, experts are appointed to appraise the land, which is done on the following basis, from which is deducted the expense of the survey and of its revision:

(A) Two dollars and twenty-three cents, Guatemala currency, per acre, if the land is proper to raise cattle, grow cereals, vintage, indigo, *jeniquen* (from which the sisal fiber is made) and other analogous cultivations.

(B) Three dollars and fifty-seven cents per acre if the land is proper to grow cane, banana, tobacco and *raime.*

(C) Four dollars and ninety cents per acre if the land is proper to grow coffee or cotton, or contains wood from which timber can be extracted, either for building or for other purposes.

The prices quoted are in Guatemala currency which at present is worth nine cents in U. S. gold for one peso, making the price of land twenty cents, thirty-two cents and forty-five cents U. S. gold, respectively, per acre. When the present prices were fixed, in 1894, the currency was silver, worth about 50 cents in gold for one peso.

After the appraisement is made, the President orders that the titles be issued to the applicant on payment of the value of the land, less expense of survey.

There is no restriction on foreigners acquiring and holding land in Guatemala save on the frontiers of the adjoining countries, which is not definitely defined, but it is generally understood there must be at least one tract of 250 acres between it and the borders. (Guatemala Land Decree of June 18, 1913.)

The further acquisition of extensive tracts of land in Guatemala by corporations, foreign or native, will be prevented by a decree recently issued prohibiting the sale, transfer or mortgaging of Government land grants for ten years from date of the grant, and then only on the production of proof that one-third of the land is under cultivation.

The greater part of all available land in Guatemala is owned by the State and comes under this prohibition, which is also operative in the case of land already acquired by Government grants.

Anything else you wish answered, look the *Adventure* magazine over carefully, and if you don't find it, send me more questions.

Maps of Montana

AND the number of horses depends on your dudesomeness:

Question:—"To whom need I write to have the map of Idaho and Montana States, showing me all the lakes, mountains, cities, villages, etc.; and what kind of arms I've got to take with me? What kind of country is it if it is mining or otherwise? How many horses does a party of five need to have to bring a tent and all necessary articles?"—JOS. BANCOURT, Derby Line, Vt.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—The most accurate general maps of Idaho and Montana which would show all the lakes, mountains, forest reserves, Indian reservations, etc., are those published by the Commissioner of the General Land Office. Address him at Washington, D. C. A small charge is made for these maps.

If you are interested in a certain locality in one of these States write the Director of the U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., for an "Index to Atlas Sheets of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming." These topographic Atlas sheets are very valuable to a hunter or a prospector. They show elevations, streams, trails, roads and habitations. Unfortunately they do not cover the entire area.

If you are interested in a region that is included in a forest reserve write the District Forester, Missoula, Montana, for a map of the forest reserves in which you are interested. These forest-reserve maps are accurate and give almost as much detailed information as do the Atlas topographic sheets.

If we knew what kind of a trip you are contemplating we could advise you better as to the kind of arms to take with you. Unless you contemplate a hunting-trip or a prospecting-trip into the inaccessible places of Idaho or Montana you would not need any firearms. The .25 high-power, the .30-30 and the .35-caliber rifles are heavy enough for the game in these States.

The western part of Montana and the eastern and northern parts of Idaho are mountainous and heavily timbered. Considerable mining is done in this region as well as lumbering and farming in the lower valleys.

For a two weeks' trip in the mountains a party of five should have five pack-horses. The customary allowance is one riding-animal and one pack-horse to each member of the party. For a "dude" outfit the allowance is often doubled, it all depending upon the size of the "dude's" pocketbook.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Moose-Hunting in Quebec and Ontario.

HERE are some important facts for the big-game hunter—facts, that is, if some legislature doesn't meet and repeal 'em before next Fall:

Question:—"I am writing you for some information in regard to a hunting-trip that four of us fellows are planning to take to Canada next Fall Our object is moose. Here are a few of the questions I would like to ask:

What part of Ontario or Quebec would you recommend as the best place to hunt moose?

What are the chances of seeing a moose?

What does a license to hunt moose cost a citizen of the United States in Ontario or Quebec?

Does this license entitle a citizen of the United States to take game out of Canada, and are there any duties on game from Canada to the United States?

Can a guide be obtained at hunting-grounds, and what are their rates per day?

What would you estimate a trip of this kind would cost outside of railroad fares? We are planning on a trip of about three weeks.

What is the most direct route to the designated place from Brockville, Ont., *via* what railroads?

What other game would we be likely to find at this place, and may it be hunted with the same license as for moose?

We would appreciate any additional information in regard to the trip."—STANLEY W. CADWELL, Solvay, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—The Quebec season in Pontiac County (Temiskaming) opens Sept. 10th on moose and in the rest of Quebec on Sept. 20th. Black bear opens August 20th, although not fit to kill (*i. e.*, their hides not prime) before Sept. 8th. Deer, duck and grouse opens Sept. 1st. N. R. (none resident) license costs $25 and permits legal killing of one bull moose, two deer, two caribou, unstated bear, and duck and grouse.

The Ontario season opens north only of the Canadian Transcontinental Line (*i. e.*, west of Cochrane and north of the Line) on October 1st; but this area north of the Line is not the best moose country. North of the main line of the C. P. R. it opens October 25th and south of the C. P. R. main line (*i. e.*, south of Mattawa-North Bay) it opens November 5th. License costs $25 and permits killing of one bull moose, one deer, one caribou, and duck. Grouse open only from Nov. 5th to 20th.

Now the moose proposition in either Ontario or Quebec is primarily a water one and "calling," which means the period between Sept. 10th and Oct. 15th. Hence you are virtually shut out of the right season for moose in Ontario, and for that reason I strongly recommend Quebec's areas as catching most favorable conditions.

Moose-hunting in the virgin mooseland of the North is a proposition practically demanding the use of capable guides, and not more than two sportsmen to one guide are practical in this game.

Don't look for a "bargain" on such a trip. I am mailing you a copy of the writer's "Guide to Outdoor Canada," which treats of the big-game and other outdoor areas of both Ontario and Quebec.

There is no duty on shipping heads or meat home to the States from Canada. Railway fares would run about $27 round trip Montreal to your detraining-points—Amos or Lasarre. As stated, either license (Ontario or Quebec) covers the game listed in the above details.

Think it over and let me know further and I will gladly take up in detail any specific trip.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Learning Japanese

IT DOESN'T seem to be the awful job most of us have been in the habit of thinking it is:

Question:—"Would greatly appreciate information regarding the following questions:

The approximate time involved in studying the Japanese language in order to have a fair working knowledge of same. Also, advice as to whether the language is universal to the islands, or that different districts have different dialects.

The address in New York of capable teachers of the language.

A history of Japan in one volume. One that would cover the entire known history of the empire generally rather than in great detail.

Information that would be of value to a person contemplating going there for a year or two after having obtained a fair knowledge of the language.

The similarity or dissimilarity between spoken and written Chinese and Japanese.

Thank you in advance; and I suggest that you ignore any of the foregoing questions that involve any great trouble on your part."—JOHN F. X. LOUGHRAN, D. C., New York.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—It is hard to say just how long it may take one to gain a working knowledge of the Japanese language—much depends upon whether one is a trained student or not. Personally I should allow myself about six months to gain a fair idea of the spoken language and a passing knowledge of the written. After that, residence amongst Japanese would add daily to one's ability to use the knowledge gained, to one's working vocabulary, and to an extension of knowledge of both the spoken and written language. It is a difficult language to really master, but a smattering will put one on the road to unearthing facilities for further study.

The one standard language will carry one throughout the country excepting perhaps in the Aino district in the north. Some sections have colloquialisms or provincialisms, as we have in our own country, but which are quite understandable.

For a New York teacher of Japanese I refer you to inquire at the rooms of the Japan Society, 25 West 43d St., New York.

"A History of the Japanese People," by Brinkley and Kibuchi, is published by George H. Doran Company, 244 Madison Avenue, N. Y. Also inquire of Orientalia, 22 East 60th St., New York.

For general information to one contemplating living in Japan, see all the above named authorities. Also read some books of travel covering Japan—some of the more recent ones, such as "The Mystery of the Far East," by Arthur Judson Brown; "Samurai Trails," Lucian Swift Kirtland; "Japan Day by Day," Edward S. Morse.

Briefly—for the full discussion of the relation between the Japanese and Chinese languages would occupy a volume—Japanese has adopted many commercial and scientific and modern terms from the Chinese into its spoken language. Its written characters—ideographs—were adopted and adapted from the Chinese in the fifth century. So, while the spoken languages are fundamentally dissimilar there is a striking similarity in the written languages of Japan and China.

Trust this may put you on the track of what you desire.

Camping for New Yorkers

GOOD places only six or eight miles out:

Question:—"Myself and two other boys are going to camp for a month somewhere north of New York City. Would you be so good as to let me know if there is a good place to camp on the west side of the Hudson from 50 to 75 miles north? We intend walking there. Could you tell me the best road to take? A good fishing stream near by? If it is not too much trouble would you give me a few hints?"—K. KEMP, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—If you cross the 127th Street Ferry to Fort Lee and walk up the road above the Palisades you will arrive in about three days in the Catskill-Mountain country. You will find places to camp all north of Fort Lee after about six or eight miles. You'll want to bear to the left from the Hudson a mile or two, as I believe the Palisades road is now built up a good deal.

When you are in the Catskills, you will find a lot of brooks and creeks and perhaps a few ponds or lakes. Sullivan County, New York, is good camping region; deer are found there wild, for example.

Maps of this region: write U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., for "Index of Topographical Survey" maps of New York and northern New Jersey. Sheets covering the west bank of the Hudson and Catskill-Mountain region will give you all you will need of roads, streams, etc. Get these maps and cut them along the lines of longitude and latitude, and paste one-eighth of an inch apart on cheese-cloth rectangles. Thus they fold up in a square about 4 x 5 inches, and these maps show mountains, streams, ponds, roads, etc.—everything you'll want. Look them over before starting, pick your route from Fort Lee Ferry (maps show houses and to some extent, towns, and the other details).

You'll want to carry small packs, containing camp outfit; and the outfits should weigh not more than twenty-five pounds each. Buy grub for a day or two, and then when in camp buy from farms, or stores nearest town.

Books on opposite side of this sheet will help you *re* camping experience facts. I know of no better book than "Boy Scouts' Handbook."

The Flying-Dutchman Legend

IF IT'S so, all I can say is that it was pretty tough on the crew to get soaked along with the captain, for something the captain did by himself:

Question:—"Of all tales of the supernatural the most interesting to me is that of the Flying Dutchman. I will thoroughly appreciate the answers to the following questions:

When and where did the Flying Dutchman originate?

What is the original story?

Has the Dutchman appeared a great deal in late years?

What about the statements of people who claim to have seen the Flying Dutchman?"—GILBERT HOAR, Perry, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—The legend of the Flying Dutchman is of a Dutch skipper, who, in the early part of the seventeenth century, was trying to round the Cape of Good Hope in the teeth of a succession of heavy gales, against which his clumsy craft was unable to beat to windward and gain any way. This Dutch skipper is said to have blasphemously defied the Almighty to keep him from rounding the cape and declared that he would keep at it, in spite of heaven and hell, until he made it. He was taken at his word, and is supposed to be still at it. Imaginative sailormen of by-gone years, when encountering the common occurrence of heavy weather off the cape and a head wind, used to imagine that out of the mist they could see the galiot of the Flying Dutchman, with its dauntless captain standing on her high poop and shaking his fist at the stormy sky. It is quite safe to say that the Flying Dutchman has not appeared a great deal of recent years. In fact few modern seamen have ever heard of the legend.

Setting Sights on a Rifle

BUT if you have no aptitude for tools, you'd better take the job to a gunsmith—a good gunsmith:

Question:—"I would like some information on the safest or the best way in setting or adjusting front and rear sights of a Marlin rifle .22 caliber.

Enclosed find postage."—M. W. DANCO, Eddystone, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I advise the following manner of setting sights on a rifle, which I always use:

Secure a piece of copper or brass, say a rod about three inches in length; this is to place against the base of the sight, to prevent the sight being battered by the hammer.

Secure the rifle in a vise, with some burlap wrapped about the barrel to prevent the jaws of the vise from marring the finish. Then place the rod against the base of the sight, and drive out from left, looking toward the muzzle, to right. Then drive the new sight in from right to left, as nearly as you can get it to the proper position. This must be determined by actual target-shooting, however. Both front and rear open sights are set in this manner; the rifle must be unloaded, of course.

If you wish to attach a peep sight, first remove the two screws in the grip, or tang, of the rifle, and screw on the sight with the screws furnished for this purpose. Then look through it and see if the two sights, front and rear, on the rifle agree with it. Then, if it leans to one side or the other, loosen the screws, and place a bit of paper under the side toward which it leans. In this manner, after several trials, you can determine just how to set the sight. Then, if you wish to use another sight in front, drive out the one on the rifle, without disturbing the open sight on the barrel, and insert the new front sight, when by looking through the peep and rear sights, you can see how the sights should be set.

The Bass of Wabasha

PRIME Summer sport:

Question:—"Having heard a great deal of the wonderful fishing for bass in the upper Mississippi, I am thinking of taking a try at it. I have the tackle; what I would like to know is where to go.

I am especially desirous, if possible, to make a two or three weeks' canoe trip down the river. Would you advise purchasing a canoe, or is it possible to rent one? How cold are the nights? What is the best season for the fishing?

I am enclosing a self-addressed envelop to facilitate your reply, together with stamps as suggested by 'Ask Adventure'."—E. BAKER, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—In my estimation the best bass fishing on the Mississippi is about Wabasha or the mouth of the Chippewa. Before I could assign you a fishing-trip of two or three weeks, floating in a canoe, it would be best to apprize me if you have a particular point at which you wish to end the trip. Say it were completed at Rock Island, you would have to start about where it comes out from Lake Winibigogish. I do not think you could rent a canoe up there.

June is a good month for the float; in fact almost all the Summer months, preferably June after the sixteenth, and early September. But sometimes it is just as good fishing during July or August.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

The *Cumberland's* Crew

Oh, shipmates, come gather and list to my ditty,
Of a terrible battle that happened of late;
Let each good Yankee tar shed a sad tear of pity
When he thinks of the once gallant *Cumberland's* fate.
The eighth day of March told a terrible story
And many brave lads to this world bid adieu;
But our flag it was wrapped in a mantle of glory
By the heroic deed of the *Cumberland's* crew.

On that ill-fated day about nine in the morning
The sky it was lovely, and bright shone the sun,
When the drums of the *Cumberland* sounded a warning
That told every brave seaman to stand to his gun;
For an ironclad frigate upon us came bearing
And high in the air the rebel flag flew;
Yes, the pennant of treason she proudly was wearing,
Determined to conquer the *Cumberland's* crew.

Then up spoke our brave captain with stern resolution,
Saying: "Boys, of this monster now don't be dismayed.
We have sworn to maintain our beloved Constitution
And to die for Country we are not afraid!
We fight in the right, lads; our cause it is glorious;
To our bright, starry banner we'll ever stand true;
We die with our guns or conquer victorious."
He was answered by cheers from the *Cumberland's* crew.

Then our gallant ship poured forth her guns' dreadful thunder;
Our broadsides like hail on the rebel we pour.
But the people gazed on struck with terror and wonder,
For our shots struck her sides, then glanced harmlessly o'er.
But the "Pride of Our Navy" could never be daunted,
Though the dead and the wounded our decks they did strew;
Yet the flag of the Union, how proudly it flaunted,
Sustained by the blood of the *Cumberland's* crew!

She fought us three hours with stern resolution,
Till those rebels found cannon would never avail;
For the flag of Secession had no power to gall us
And the —— rebel tyrants could never prevail.
So she rammed us amidships; our planks she did sever;
Her sharp iron prow pierced our noble ship through;
And then as she sank 'neath the dark, rolling waters—
"We die at our guns," yelled the *Cumberland's* crew.

Slowly she sank 'neath Virginia's waters;
Their voices on earth will ne'er be heard more;
They'll be wept by Columbia's brave sons and fair daughters,
And their blood be avenged on Virginia's shore.
In that battle-stained hulk they are silently lying;
Their spirits to earth have fore'er bid adieu—
But above them the Star-Spangled Banner's still flying:
It was *nailed to the mast* by the *Cumberland's* crew.

Now, Columbia's sweet birthright of freedom's communion,
Thy flag never floated so proudly afore,
For spirits of those that died for our Union
Around those bright folds now exultingly soar.
And whenever our brave sailors in battle assemble
May God keep our colors the red, white and blue;
For beneath those bright folds we'll cause tyrants to tremble,
Or *we die at our guns* like the *Cumberland's* crew.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

WOULD like to hear from some of the shipmates aboard the S. S. *Kimta* after we left Antwerp, Belgium, in Dec., 1919.—Address GABRIEL GONZALEZ (alias Texas), 301 W. Bluff St., Fort Worth, Texas.

ALL members of Det. Q. M. C., Fort Clark, Texas, during 1919-1920 are requested to write to one of the old boys.—Address W. E. E., Box 292, Eatonton, Ga.

GOWDER, CLARENCE MILTON. Left New Holland, Ga., about March 1st, 1922. Small man, blond, cotton-mill worker. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—Address MRS. CLARENCE GOWDER, care of Pleasant Jones, R. F. D. 5, Gainesville, Ga.

WOODING, Q. A. Last heard of at Pearl River, N. Y. If you see this kindly communicate with your friend.—Address A. T. PETERSEN, care of Manley, Moore Lumber Co., Camp 1, Fairfax, Wash.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CONKLIN, BUHL, MR. and MRS. Last heard of in Alma, Michigan, 1920. Please write your old friend at this address, before August 15, 1922, as I sail for home one month later and I would like to locate you.—Address DONALD E. CHRISTIE, Pvt., Medical Dept., Fort Mills, Corregidor Island, Philippine Islands.

O'DONNELL, JOSEPH. Age about thirty-two. In 1913 he was in 126 Co., C. A. C., U. S. Army, Port Townsend, Washington. Was in Nelso, B. C., early 1914 and later worked as motorman on street-car, and also for Thiel Detective Agency, Winnipeg. Was later heard from at Hamilton, Ont. He may have entered the Canadian Army under an assumed name. Any information will be appreciated by his sister and brother.—Address MRS. SUSIE BURGETT, Barn Hill, P. O. Ohio.

QUINN, JASALPH. Was 2nd class fireman, battle-ship *Oregon*, Summer 1915. Formerly of Butte, Montana. Please write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

FINNEGAN, JOSEPH PATRICK. Born in Butte, Montana. Race-track employee. Last heard of in San Francisco, Calif., 1915. Please write to me.—Address C. J. DONNELLY, 719½ Crocker St., Los Angeles, Calif.

NELSON, JOHN (Battler.) Served as Pvt., Cpl. and Sgt. Co. "G" 6th U. S. Inf. Was transferred later to a N. A. outfit as Reg. Supply Sgt. This during the war. Please write, have some dope on Giles.—Address JACK ROOK, 155 Ave. Malakoff, Paris, France.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 10th issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

REED, LUCEDE. Was adopted by people by the name of Cook at the age of six or seven years. Is now about seventeen or eighteen years old. Any information as to her whereabouts will be appreciated by her brother.—Address THOMAS REED, care of *Adventure*.

DEADY, JOHN. Last heard of in Fresno, Calif., June 7, 1920. Age forty-five years, black hair, black eyes. Had an interest in a forty-acre peach orchard. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ED. DEADY, Lock Box 251, Baker, Mont.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

McIVER, LAWRENCE. Left San Diego, Calif., Fall of 1914. Please write to me.—Address JAMES D. GULLETT, C. P. O., Quarters, Mare Island, Calif.

BAUER, C. J. Why don't you send mother a line?

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BOUND, JOHN F. Left home April 6th, 1922. Wore blue serge suit, tan shoes, light cap, five feet ten inches tall, light complexion, blue eyes and good teeth. Age thirty years. Might have gone to B. C. Ex-service man and member of American Legion. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. J. B. BOUND, 737 S. McDonough St., Montgomery, Alabama.

HABERLY, FRANCIS K., and DR. S. S. HABERLY. Francis last heard of in Ft. Wayne, Ind. Age twenty-six years. Dr. Haberly last heard of in Cumberland, Okla., in 1907. Any information will be appreciated.—Address THELMA HABERLY MATAS, 1440 E. Washington St., Phœnix, Arizona.

THE following have been inquired for in either the July 30th or August 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

ANDERSON, CHARLES; Andy; Colam, Frank Howe; Collins, Carter; Clark, Edwin E.; Cleveland, Edward or Harry; Davis, F.; Denham, Walter E.; Fowler, M. R.; Glenn, Bowdin; Hetzel, Claude Le Roy; Irving, James D.; Jackson, Howard; Keenan, Wm.; Keener, A. W.; Kenney, Joe; Mason, Albert L.; Masters, Mark B.; Meyer, Paul F.; Miller, Edward; Mitchell, Geo.; Ponish, Henry; Rasmussen, Holger; Slaven, Joe; Smith, Ben.; Spencer, Earl (Kid); Starke, James Elbert; Timmel, Ed.; Wilson, John P.

MISCELLANEOUS—Cunningham heirs of Boston, Mass., can be located by writing to J. C. Harriss, 911 Fournier St., Ft. Worth, Texas; "Happy" letters addressed to you at last address returned; would like to hear from Martin Purcell and Thomas Quigley, last heard of at Tampico, Mexico, in Jan., 1921; would like to hear from Albert Diar somewhere in N. C., or any other fellow who served in the Sec. Holding Ho. under command of Major Brocas at La Suze, France; members of the family of Montgomery whose ancestors lived in Mecklenburg County, N. C., between 1750 and 1800, are requested to communicate with W. V. Montgomery, One Madison Ave., N. Y.; would like to hear from any of the old bunch who sevred with me in either Co. E or Headquarters Co., 166 Inf., 42nd Division, during the war.

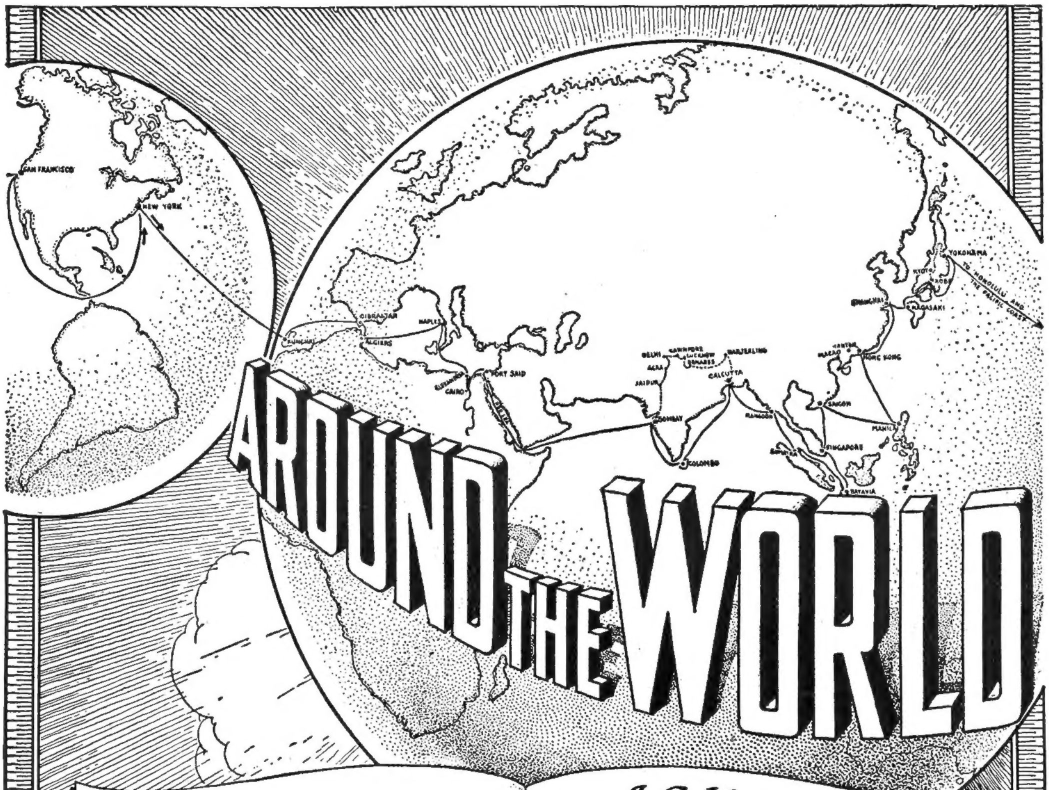
A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

AUGUST 30TH ISSUE

Besides the complete novel and the complete novelette mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

CROTONS A seaman's evil genius.	*J. Allan Dunn*
THE LAW-BRINGERS Bad-men of New Mexico get tamed down.	*Frederick R. Bechdolt*
TROUBLED WATERS Caught between two mountain sheriffs.	*Lewis H. Kilpatrick*
PARTNERS The menace of poison arrows in the New Guinea bush.	*John Joseph Scarry*
THE GRAY CHARTERIS A Four-Part Story Part II *Abado* disappears.	*Robert Simpson*
CATCHING A TATAR A ray from the deep.	*F. St. Mars*
ONE NIGHT AT OSABA Standing off the Mexicans.	*Edwin Cole*
OLD SPUD'S LAST FIGHT A renegade from the U. S. Army gets his.	*E. O. Foster*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ALEXANDRIA
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DELHI
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BENARES
DARJEELING
CALCUTTA
BOMBAY
COLOMBO
RANGOON
SUMATRA
SINGAPORE
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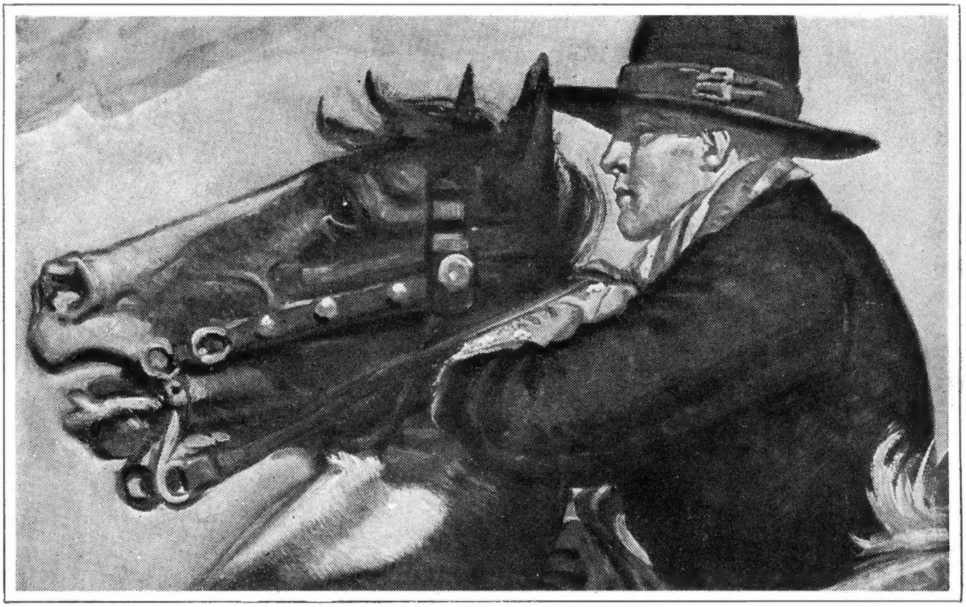

"I want a horse today—
one with four legs"

said the "old man's" son and the wranglers reluctantly gave him a high-flier instead of the broken-down wrecks he'd had since he came.

Cuthbert, the college-bred son of the ranch owner, was a regular fellow, but the cowboys refused to accept him. They tried to make him play the fool by sending him in search of gold when they knew he'd find "fool's gold," iron pyrites. But Cuthbert, the "tenderfoot," turned the tables on these hardened cowboys.

You will enjoy reading this amusing story, "Is Luck a Lady?" by Harry Sinclair Drago, in *Everybody's Magazine* for August. Norman Springer, Francis Bellamy, James Oppenheim and Richard Wright will also have stories in the current number of this great all-fiction magazine.

August

Everybody's
Magazine

FIRST IN FICTION ON EVERY NEWS-STAND